CAPTAIN MACDONALD'S DAUGHTER

A Novel

BY

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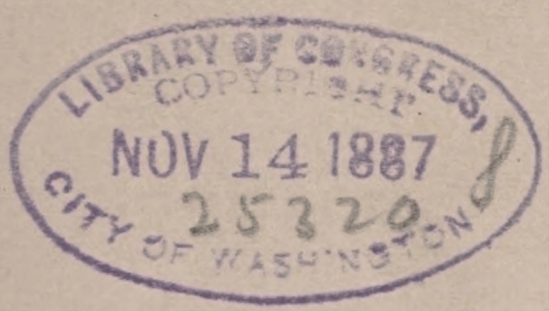

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To L. S.

My dear S.—I dedicate to you, in pledge of everlasting friendship and affection, this simple story of one who sinned and suffered.

A. C.

CAPTAIN MACDONALD'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

SCOTLAND is essentially the land of "plain living and high thinking;" and among all the thousands of Scottish families who owned this national characteristic a quarter of a century ago, there was not one to whom it came more naturally than the family in the Manse of Strathlowrie.

Strathlowrie, for a town of its size, was not ill-off for places of worship. There were the Established Church, and the Free Church, and the Original Secession Church—whose members called themselves, not without reason, a "remnant"—and the Congregational Chapel, that looked twice as large after the great Dr. Lyndsay Alexander preached in it, and the Blank Meeting-house, where Peter Angus mostly held forth. Peter was not a Reverend, but in local parlance a "merchant"—a term which, being interpreted, meant a dealer in almost everything that can be worn, or devoured, or imbibed, together with a

great variety of things that cannot. The Blanks, being even fewer in number than the "remnant," could not afford a resident minister, and Peter was only too happy, after practising Shylock all the week, to play Boanerges on Sunday.

Now, whether what I have called *the* Manse was Established, Free, or Original Secession, I am not going to tell you. It must have been one of the three; for though there were four ministers — and Peter Angus—in Strathlowrie, there were only three Manses.

Our Manse, within or without, bore no token of rich endowments. It was a square structure, plastered, gravelled, and whitewashed, with a stone wing that had been built when the bairns began to come. There were dining-room and kitchen below; parlor, bedroom, and study above; and a long, low, haunted attic to finish off with. The wing contained two bedrooms, on the wood-work of which a Strathlowrie joiner had lavished some really good carving. "It'll be an adver*tise*ment," he had said to his wife when remonstrated with for giving too much for the money. But, alas! the wing had the slight disadvantage of being entered only from the kitchen, so that Sir Alaster Macalaster from the Castle, and the old maids his sisters, could scarcely be asked into it even to see the carving. The entrance passage was narrow and short, the stairs were narrow and steep, and both were of stone—cold and poor-looking, but kept clean,

in spite of the numerous feet, at the cost of deadly feud between Jean and the children.

The church was neither Gothic, nor Norman, nor Grecian, and yet any child could determine its style. It belonged to the Barn order of architecture — a type that for places of worship is happily becoming extinct. Joining the Manse at right angles, it did not put it to shame, being only a larger and therefore uglier edition of it.

It was Monday morning in the Manse, a time when youthful spirits were more than usually boisterous after the restraints of the day before—unless, indeed, Davie, the Master of the Revels, happened to have failed in his catechism on Sunday evening, when his merriment was apt to be spasmodic, and varied by sidelong glances at the taws, which occupied an honorable place among the Penates in the dining-room. Sunday naughtiness was always whipped, as Sunday dishes were always washed, on Monday morning; but while the dishes were disposed of the moment Jean rose, naughtiness had the delight of anticipation till after worship, yet dared not for that miss its turn in the reading, or let its voice be unheard in the psalm.

The morning began, as all other mornings began at the Manse, with the clarion voice of Mr. Leslie sounding *reveille*. Woe to that child who did not dance when the minister piped! The sweets of his stolen snooze were apt to be broken in upon by a

convulsion that landed him in the middle of the floor, one ear tingling with a terrible fillip, and both with the assurance that if their owner was not on his way to his sea-bath in five minutes the minister would know the reason why. In the matter of rising and bathing there was one rule for boys and girls, so that any summer morning you might have seen a bevy of yawning and sometimes cross young mortals scrambling down the great heap of stones that lay between the Manse and the sands — the girls then going in one direction and the boys in another to the caves, their only bathing-houses.

Your sea is a great magician; for, presto! in five minutes the sleepiness and the crossness have vanished, and in half an hour the shabby Manse dining-room, which is also sitting-room and nursery, is brightened by glowing faces and uproarious with all sorts of noises: bits of the Greek grammar from Colin, wild barks from Kelpie, piteous mews from the cat—a respectable and peaceable animal whose lines had not fallen in pleasant places—fearful crashes caused by Davie's vaulting ambition overleaping itself, and the severe moralizing of Jean as she lays the cloth — "Gude save us!" Said I nae weel that ministers' bairns are aye waur than the lave?"

On this particular Monday morning the two little girls have sallied out to "the Corner" to refresh themselves with a glimpse of the outer world, and

to display themselves and their clean ginghams. Their house stood on a quiet street, or lane rather, leading to the sea—a road which appeared to have been made solely for the convenience of the Manse occupants. Between the house and the sands there was nothing but the Manse garden; while on the other side of the lane there was only a butcher's high-walled pasture, where doomed cattle and sheep spent their last days in gorging. But the street on which the church faced had life enough of its kind. With the exception of the rather imposing residence of Mr. Campbell, a lawyer—the great man of our congregation—it was filled with poor cottages, and to the swarms of children belonging to these the minister and his bairns seemed very grand indeed. Tory and Nan were quite aware of this, and usually bore themselves, Tory especially, with mingled dignity and condescension.

Tory is beautiful, and she knows it. Her blue eyes, golden curls, and seraphic smile win the hearts of everybody. She has the gift of song too, and the old bodies that listen to her singing "The Lord's my Shepherd" wipe their eyes and bless her, and call her an angel bairn.

To-day Tory is more than usually lofty. She looks past, not at, her admirers, and at last bewilders Nan by turning to her and asking inconsequently, "Has the bell sounded?"

"What bell?" Nan would have said; but Tory

nipped the intention in the bud by frowning, jerking her dress, and actually attempting a wink.

"Has the breakfast bell sounded?" then she asked.

Nan could truthfully answer that it had not. With so many pairs of excellent lungs in the house the minister considered gongs and bells superfluities. The family gatherings were usually prefaced by a series of shouts: "Dinner's ready!" "Your porridge is getting cold!" or, "Come ben to worship!"

The youthful admirers looked on with increased awe. Tory strutted up and down in front of the church railings, carrying on with Nan a conversation in which she managed to introduce her turquoise brooch and gold pencil-case, together with passing allusions to the "drawing-room" and the "library." If the minister had only heard!

Suddenly a burst of mocking laughter greets her ears, and looking round, with cheeks crimson with indignation, she recognizes as the offender a bare-headed, barefooted girl a year or two older than herself. Kirsty Polson had been Jean's drudge at the Manse until the little girls had developed too great a fondness for her. Kirsty advanced smiling. "Ye didna ken I had come hame," she said; then seeing wrath in Tory's face, "Losh, Tory, ye needna mind me; I wad never tell. Let's hae a game o' holies."

Alas for Tory! To play marbles out of the garden, and to play with Kirsty anywhere, are in-

fringements of the articles of war existing between her and her seniors. But the angel bairn has a liking for Kirsty and a passion for "holies," and so down on the dirty pavement goes the clean gingham, the golden curls in close proximity to Kirsty's carrots, and the fingers that might have been crashing out "The Battle of Prague" on the tinkling cymbal in the Manse parlor, manipulating marbles fished from the pockets of Kirsty's dirty little brother. Alas for Tory!

Familiarity breeds contempt! The juvenile unwashed gather round, not so respectful as they have been. Kirsty has certainly deteriorated during her absence, Tory decides. She is not so reverential as she used to be; and when she wins she actually insists on giving the "knuckles;" and in trying to prevent Tory's escape, creates a wide breach between the body and skirt of the gingham. The plebs side with their order, and shout "It's no fair!" when Tory indignantly refuses to undergo the humiliation. In the heat of the controversy Kirsty takes aim at the sacred knuckles in mid-air, and Tory, furious with pain and mortification, delivers on her enemy's cheek a sounding slap. What might have happened next there is no knowing. What does happen is that a supercilious-looking youth in blue glasses comes suddenly upon the scene, and in another moment the angel bairn is seized with an iron grasp and borne off to justice. To appear before

the assembled family in such a plight is terrible indeed, but not so terrible as to be powerless to avenge herself when she hears Kirsty announce triumphantly to her satellites, "She'll catch 't!"

Let us draw a veil over the next few minutes. Tory's solo being over, the family raise in chorus the morning psalm. The reader may look and listen if he will.

The Rev. Robert Leslie was a man who feared God and executed righteousness. Extremes meet, and the cardinal article of Mr. Leslie's creed was not at all unlike the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. He believed that every sin has a temporal as well as an eternal punishment assigned to it; but while he taught and believed that adequate penitence might bring about the remission of the greater penalty, he acted upon the principle that *nothing* could remit the less, and that it was the special province of God's ministers to see this meted out. "Are you sorry for your sin, or sorry that you are going to feel the taws?" he would dryly ask the family penitent. Offenders before the kirk-session fared no better. In both cases forgiveness would eventually be given, and given so graciously that neither child nor grown person cherished animosity towards the avenger; but it was never given till the fullest satisfaction had been made.

Do not picture to yourself, however, a morose bigot, as the Scottish minister has been so often painted.

As he sits there, singing with all his soul and with a mighty voice, your heart warms to him at once. Scarcely fifty, of massive but well-built figure, rather under the medium height, he looks the incarnation of physical strength; and he is. A glance at the face assures you that there is a sound mind in the sound body. The features are large, but firmly cut; the jaw is square; the lips firm, but capable of melting into a smile that wins your heart; the gray eyes are by turns threatening and tender; the black hair scarcely shows a thread of gray, except in the closely cut side-whiskers. Altogether, it is the face of a man whom you must obey, and must love.

The beauty of Mr. Leslie's rule was, that there was nothing vague about it. He took care that a child fully understood what was required and what was forbidden before he administered the punishment annexed. Then it was a law that embraced himself. First to rise, last to go to bed, never idle, never self-indulgent, sharing the children's porridge and milk, or whatever their fare might be, dividing equitably with them the simple dainties that devoted members of his flock offered out of their poverty—how could one murmur against such a leader? I have known ministers—ay, *ministers*—who were the most charming of men in society, and the most cross and grumpy—regular wet-blankets—at their own firesides. But our minister, if only obeyed, was the most genial of men, and his most charming ways

were for his own wife and bairns. Delightful anecdotes, useful bits of knowledge, were constantly being poured forth, so that the children absorbed information as they did light and air, and learned a thousand things without knowing they were learning one.

The children thought their father's absence of nerves a redeeming quality. One of the ministers they knew required strictest seclusion and Sunday quiet for his sermon-making, while Monday was a day of sleep and slops on his part, and anxious inquiries on that of the congregation; recalling to mockers what a certain wit said at the expense of the poet Rogers and his efforts. Mr. Leslie wrote in his study, but he heard all that was going on. If revelry held sway out of time, he sallied out and set things to rights; if revelry kept its proper hours, the children might screech like wild Indians, or dance over his head till the old house trembled.

Mrs. Leslie is in most respects the opposite of her husband. Tall, slender, fragile-looking, with auburn hair in which there are more silver threads than in the minister's dark locks—although she is fully ten years the younger of the two—and blue, unclouded eyes, hers is the face of one who has reached a region of perpetual calm; the face of one, too, it is beginning to be whispered in Strathlowrie, not long for this world. Mrs. Leslie adores her husband, and everybody adores her. Mr. Leslie looks at her wist-

fully, but will not allow there is much the matter. And she is so bright, though so gentle and so calm, that it is almost impossible for even the eyes of love to see clearly. Her step has grown painfully slow, and sometimes she stops on the stairs to rest; and she has a bright spot on each cheek, and a cough that tugs at her husband's heart. But then her smile is so reassuring, and her voice so cheerful as she says, "It's nothing, Robert!" that the minister believes that it *is* nothing, and tells her she is growing daily more like the winsome lassie he fell in love with so long ago, and that none of the bairns will ever be half so bonnie, or any one in the world half so good. If the children could only have heard!

The supercilious-looking youth in blue glasses who figured as Tory's captor is the minister's eldest son. He is a medical student in Aberdeen, home at present for his holidays, and his father's shrewd gray eyes are often quietly taking notes when Rob little suspects it. Rob is a good and clever lad, who has had his goodness and cleverness made so much of that he has become inordinately self-conceited. The children, on his return, had received him with acclamation, but the very first week had seen them turn against him. He reproved the boy's Scotch, remonstrated against their noise, attempted to pull their ears, and got his own well pulled in return; in short, stood too much on the dignity of his nineteen years. The situation for him was daily becoming

more uncomfortable. The disaffection seemed to be spreading. The Corner Arabs imitated his walk. Daft Geordie, the "natural" of Strathlowrie, had appeared at a funeral in high, stiff collar and blue glasses—doubtless furnished by Davie, who thenceforth spoke of Geordie as Rob's twin. But for his mother Rob almost thought he would have run away.

Mrs. Leslie, with true mother's fondness for the eldest son and the father's namesake, thinks Rob perfection, blue glasses and all. "You won't be hard on him?" she asks, when her husband expresses his opinion. "Hard on him!" laughed the minister. "No need of that. By the time his vacation is over he will have found his level, and that is all he needs." Mrs. Leslie was not quite satisfied; she thought Rob should have the respect of his younger brothers and sisters. "So he should," said the minister, "and that is just what nobody can force from them. He is sure to get it as soon as he deserves it, and we'll even let him fight it out with them. I don't want to see our boy a self-righteous prig."

Margaret comes next to Rob. She is tall and slender like her mother, but has sandy hair and bad complexion and teeth. Mr. Leslie has sometimes ruefully said she must be a changeling, she has developed such extraordinary tastes for a daughter of his. She has had a passion for gorging her stomach with sweets and her mind with exciting novels, and fearful scenes have been enacted in the Manse when an

unexpected search has revealed contraband articles of either kind. Stern discipline, or it may be policy—the minister thinks the former, of course—has at length gained the day. For the last year Margaret has turned over a new leaf, and lo! virtue has brought its reward; for her eighteenth birthday, just passed, has actually seen her engaged. Margaret, except for a solitary winter in Edinburgh, has never been out of Strathlowrie, yet she has a distinguished air and easy, graceful manners. The old maids at the Castle confide to her father that many a duchess would envy her carriage, and that her swan-like neck is the very image of Lady Cockleorum's in the "Book of Beauty" for 1800—the same year of grace in which they had been launched into society. They more than hint, too, that they think her thrown away on young Mr. O'Neil, and refer to schemes they have had for having her at the Castle. Mr. Leslie says "Tut! tut!" and bluntly declares that had Margaret not been engaged, she should have been a governess, and assures the old ladies that he only hopes young O'Neil may not regret his bargain. As for the little girls, who are alternately Margaret's pets and victims, they think it delightful to be on such friendly terms with the handsome young minister, who was always spoken of by Margaret's intimates as "so interesting." But they think him too good for such a fate, and whenever they have a battle royal with Margaret, their crowning threat

is that of writing to Mr. O'Neil and "exposing" her.

Here is faithful, plodding, warm-hearted Colin, with unruly yellow hair that makes an unbecoming frame for his honest red face. Colin is the plain one of the family, and the slow and awkward one, but he has a heart of gold, and everybody knows it.

Davie is like the minister in face—"wantin' the grace," Jean tells him. He is, alas! the scapegrace of the Manse. If he appears to be unusually studious, be sure that his Greek Testament conceals some lighter and tastier trifle. While the rest of the family are "engaged in the worship of God," Davie is probably, in spite of consequences, throwing a fly at the Brownie's Burn. He puts mice in the little girls' pockets and wasps in their shoes. He breaks down on Sunday evenings over "Effectual Calling," and his memory, though excellent for ghost stories or books of travel, is weak for sermons. The most terrible deed of Davie's young life was his dressing himself in a suit of the minister's, stuffed out to fit, and under cover of the dusk visiting and praying with a bedridden parishioner. This was a feat which the minister had forbidden to be ever referred to in the Manse. What his punishment had been even his brothers and sisters did not know; but he disappeared entirely for a week, towards the end of which Nan got a terrible fright by coming suddenly upon Colin, red-eyed and red-nosed, sobbing as if his

heart would break, and asking Jean, "Oh! do ye think he can hae drooned him?"

The angel bairn, Tory, the reader already knows. The minister thought it the very irony of fate that had given him one daughter whose neck looked like Lady Cockleorum's in the "Book of Beauty" and another named Victoria. But Mrs. Leslie's mother had been a Victoria, and so there was nothing to be said. Tory's private opinion was that the name was almost worthy of her, and that she was entirely worthy of the name.

Nan, Nannie, or Annie, as she is variously called, is only an adopted daughter of the Manse. Her father, Captain MacDonald, was Mrs. Leslie's only brother, and the greatest, almost the only sorrows of the minister's wife's life had come through him. The soldier was clever, brilliant even, and delightful, but without principle. He borrowed money from relatives who had nothing to spare with one hand, and won an easy reputation for generosity by flinging it away with the other. He laid himself out to captivate where he thought it worth his while, and always succeeded; and then as soon as he took a new fancy, or the friend could be of no further use to him, he threw him remorselessly aside. The history of his married life no one exactly knew, although it was rumored that there had been a final separation one short month after the marriage. He had married in America, and news in those days trav-

elled more slowly from hemisphere to hemisphere. What was certain was that Captain MacDonald's death had been sudden — rumors spoke of a duel brought about by his own misconduct — and that shortly after it his three-year-old daughter was received at the Manse, and given a share of all its privileges and penalties.

Nan was a little pale, old-fashioned-looking child, as plain as Tory was beautiful, and so naughty when she first arrived that it must have been a real pleasure for Mr. Leslie to take her in hand. "I won't!" was an expression he had never heard from one of his own flock; yet this little mite of a thing looked him steadily in the eye and said it boldly. Not often, however; the opposing forces were too utterly disproportionate for long resistance. "*Nous avous changé tout celà!*" Mr. Leslie could truthfully say, long before the days on which our story opens.

Not that Nan was always obedient. She had a will almost as strong as the minister's, and from time to time she made futile attempts at rebellion. But Mr. Leslie's anxieties on her account—and they were many—were not on the score of her self-will. Believing that the father's sins were not only visited on, but were reproduced in, the children—or perhaps were visited on them by being reproduced in them—he watched unceasingly for any trace of those qualities which had made him loathe his brother-in-

law. And from time to time he saw enough to trouble him. If in the Manse Nan learned the inconveniences of poverty, she had also opportunity for learning the beauty and the dignity of economy; but it was a lesson she seemed quite incapable of understanding. When the children got a shilling at once, which happened but rarely, Mr. Leslie liked to test them by letting each dispose of it as he or she liked. The young Leslies, who, though prudent, were not at all selfish, generally began by the purchase of a small paper of peppermints for papa (there used to be some occult connection between Presbyterianism and peppermints!) and something less strong-smelling for mamma; then they indulged in some long coveted little dainty for themselves, perhaps; but they always kept a reserve fund which they might draw on for weeks after. Not so Nan. Her money literally burned holes in her pocket. She was quite capable of laying the whole of it out on a present, and when she gave, she gave with a willing heart. But, on the other hand, she was just as capable of frittering it away in pennyworths and half-pennyworths of things that were eaten at once or given to the first child she met; and in any case she was sure never to have a penny left at night. Mr. Leslie felt she did not buy mainly either for the pleasure of giving or having, but simply for the pleasure of spending. It was a passion with her, just as gambling is with some older people.

Mr. Leslie felt this all the more that Nan had managed to creep into a very warm corner of his heart. The child had a generous nature, she was cleverer than any of her cousins, and what she undertook, she did with an earnestness worthy of the minister himself. But then she soon tired of things. It was almost a misfortune, Mr. Leslie thought, that she could do so many things well. When, thinking to give a pleasant surprise, she produced her first verses—she and Tory called and thought them poetry — she was astonished at the pained look that came across her uncle's face. Verse-making had been one of the accomplishments of Captain MacDonald.

Tory and Nan were great friends. They had their little tiffs, as the best of friends will have, but these were not frequent. Union is strength, and the pair needed all the strength they could muster in making a stand against Davie, their common foe.

The solitary servant of the Manse, in right of her long and faithful service, claims all the privileges and takes all the liberties of her class. She rules every one in the house except the minister, and even to him she has been known to "speak back." She has a shrill voice, which in the singing at worship she pitches so high it might readily be mistaken for the bagpipes. Earlier in their acquaintance the minister decided that not nature but vanity had prompted such a performance, and made up his mind to re-

monstrate with her. So, calling her into the study one day, he gravely began, "I cannot say I like your voice, Jean—" He got no further. "Dae ye no, sir? Weel, I canna say I like yours; but we're baith as the Lord made us. I hae a teenor skirl and ye hae a bass grumph."

The great, ungainly, but sagacious-looking cur at Davie's side is a bone of contention between Jean and the children. Jean hates Kelpie, Kelpie hates Jean, but neither dares molest the other. Once on a time there was active hostility between them. After a series of "skirls" that brought not only the whole household, but a goodly contingent from "the Corner" to the kitchen, Jean displayed a leg in which there were too evident marks of Kelpie's teeth having met. Kelpie being called upon to answer (the minister always heard both sides), looked unutterable things, and fortunately his protector was there to answer for him. "She plotted [scalded] him!" cried Davie. Jean could not deny it. "Then you're well served," decided the judge. Active war ceased, but the armed truce that followed entailed a good deal of responsibility on the children. When they held their masquerades in the attic Kelpie was always one of the principal performers; but as it was a law that his paw-marks must not appear on the stair, and Jean's eyes were microscopical in detecting traces of him, Tory and Nan generally carried him up between them. Kelpie, who perfectly understood

the situation, would slip on tiptoe to the starting-point, and would not have uttered a bark for any consideration. The children, who credited Kelpie with every good quality, averred that he thoughtfully tried to make himself light, and in proof of this pointed to his agonized expression. But the minister dryly observed that he would be a less sagacious dog than he was if he failed to look agonized while his fore-legs were in the grasp of one child and his hind-legs in that of another—his long yellow body, back downward, swinging wildly between.

CHAPTER II.

But the psalm is sung; the long chapter, in which every child takes a part, read; the prayer, in which each one's needs are remembered, offered; and the family are gathered at breakfast. Equipage and fare are alike simple: brimming plates of porridge, porringers of every size and hue, and an immense jug of milk. Mrs. Leslie's tray no longer graces the board, for the minister has insisted that the cup of tea and morsel of toast shall be taken in bed. So the wife and mother sits near, but not at, the table, and in place of plate and spoon she has a sock of Davie's and a darning-needle.

"Papa," says Rob, critically, "you are thrown away on Strathlowrie. I listened carefully to the sermon yesterday, and it was really better than any I have heard since I left—with the exception, perhaps, of Dr. MacRoarer's. The poetical passages were beautiful—though I would scarcely have treated the subject as you did."

The children stared. They knew Rob was a cool hand, but this was beyond anything. Why, it was the clay turning and criticising the potter.

Honest Colin was the first to find a voice. "Crick—" he began, but stopped the forbidden expletive just in time. "—ey!" finished Davie, and got a fillip for his pains.

The shrewd gray eyes twinkled. "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam*," said he. "I would scarcely have treated Andrewina as *you* did."

Rob reddened. The washer-woman, with rash faith in his power, had consulted him as to her "hoast," and the budding doctor had given her a plaster that flayed her chest but left the cough untouched.

"Losh!" exclaimed Jean, who had just come in with more porridge, "he's gaun gyte! 'Much learning hath made him mad.'"

"Jean," said Mr. Leslie, "I have forbidden the children to use such words, and I will not allow you to use them in their hearing. *Losh* is just a corruption of a sacred name, and therefore unfit for a professing Christian to take upon her lips, being no better than profane swearing."

"Eh, sir, it wad amaist mak' a body profane sweer. Tae think I hae skelpit him mony a time, an' noo he's cockin' hissel' up to fin' faut wi' the minister! Lad," Jean viciously added, turning to the culprit, "I wish I had skelpit ye mair!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Davie. Poor Rob! Crimson with rage and mortification, he could have flown at the whole tribe of his tormentors, who laughed, shouted, and clapped their hands, till Mr. Leslie, see-

ing that his wife was suffering as much as Rob, exclaimed, "Silence!"

"I should really think, Rob," put in Margaret, with all the dignity of one engaged, "that you would remember the respect due to a minister—any minister of the Gospel."

"*Any* minister," said Davie. "H'm, that means the Reverend Hugh O'Neil, M.A." Then drawing what appeared to be a letter from his pocket, and managing to drop a bit of heather ostentatiously on the table-cloth, he read aloud:

"'Me prospects are good. Me father is ould and rich, and I have no sisters at all, at all, and no brother but mesilf.'" The passage was a paraphrase of one read by Margaret to her bosom friend Sophy Campbell the evening before.

Then Davie kissed the heather rapturously and fled, Margaret, like one possessed, in pursuit. Colin, who had followed, came back presently to report progress. "They were tearing along the sands," he said, "and though nobody could catch Davie, Margaret's long legs were doing wonders."

"It is very undignified," observed Tory; "I wish Mr. O'Neil could see her." Then, reflecting on her own morning's work, she had the grace to blush.

"It was only Davie's Greek exercise," said Colin, "and he took the heather out of a besom. But he was under the sofa in the parlor when Sophy Campbell was here."

"That was not honorable," said the gentle voice of Mrs. Leslie, "and Davie must never do it again."

"If he does," added the minister, "I will take a dealing with him."

Rob, thankful to have escaped, had taken a low stool beside his mother, and the latter was explaining to him what the minister had so often told her, that it was Strathlowrie that had made him poetical, and that he would not leave it for the world.

"Of course there is something in papa's mind that corresponds to what he sees and hears," said Mrs. Leslie. "But having that to begin with, what could call it out like Strathlowrie? Often in the sermon I say to myself, 'That's our high tide!' 'That's our sunset!' 'That's the purple on our own hills!' Ah, it is a beautiful place!" she cried. "It has been our home for twenty years, and I think it would break my heart to leave it, except—"

"Except for what, mamma?" said Rob, eagerly. In his estimation a city church, where his father would be sure to make a sensation, would outweigh all the beauties of nature the globe contained.

"Except for the fairer country, which is our true home." And Mrs. Leslie kissed her boy and rose to follow her husband to the study. There she liked best to sit—near the window, looking out now and then on the glorious panorama she loved so dearly, her needle keeping time to the minister's flying quill.

Rob was neither selfish nor obtuse. His absence had made him more quick to perceive the change in Mrs. Leslie, and this morning it seemed more apparent than ever. Could there be any special meaning in her words? The cough with which she finished seemed to accentuate them. His heart felt like lead as he heard the slow, labored step on the stairs—a pause at every stone, a long rest half-way up. He longed to rush after her, to throw himself at her feet, to lay his head in her lap as he used to do in his childish troubles—that now seemed so infinitesimally small and such ages off—and pour forth all his heart-breaking sorrow and love. As the study door closed he seized his hat and rushed out into the bright sunshine and cool fresh air.

How unhappy he was! and yet how unchanged was everything about him! The mist had risen from the sea, which, except for the grand waves on the beach, was like glass. Far to the right was the old castle of the Macalasters, and near it he could see Strathlowrie river joining the ocean. To the left were the hills on which his mother's eyes were even then resting—cultivated near the town, barren further off; hills on which played wonderful lights and shadows all day long, which reflected the gold and crimson of the sunset, and clothed themselves in deep right royal purple when the sunset had faded; hills under which were spacious caves, each with a legend of its own—caves with beautiful pebbly floors and

cool dripping walls, and clear pools in which wonderful sea-anemones fixed themselves. And far away, showing blue and misty in the distance, was the island where Margaret's Irish lover was settled—better to look at from a safe stand-point on the mainland, Rob thought, than to live in. Rob was rather tired of hearing "Isle of Beauty" constantly sung by Margaret's not too melodious voice, and both the isle and the Reverend Hugh had in his opinion suffered in consequence.

The unchanged aspect of nature was reassuring. Death was still for Rob, as for the other children of the Manse, something which must happen to everybody, but which, within any given time, would never, could never, happen to any one of the home circle. And yet Rob felt a vague disquiet, and a longing for sympathy, and a wish to be on better terms with everybody. And while his heart was thus softened a sudden turn of the rocks (he was on the braes above the sea) showed him Nan sitting quite alone, and apparently lost in thought. They were all accustomed to Nan's queer ways and inconstant moods. Either she was in the wildest spirits—the leader, after Davie, of the fun—or she was sitting silent, with a far-off look in the intelligent eyes that were the redeeming feature in her plain face, or wandering off alone, feasting her eyes and mind on the beauties Mrs. Leslie loved, but indulging not the calm pleasure of her aunt, but the passionate rapture of a nat-

ure at once strong and erratic. "What are you doing, Nan?" the minister would ask; and the answer was always the same: "Oh, I'm just wondering." Pressed on one occasion to say what she was wondering about, she said, after a moment's reflection, "I'm not wondering; I'm just feeling." And again asked what she was feeling, she said, "Oh, I feel as if my heart would burst;" and then she sobbed as if it would.

Rob had almost made up his mind to attempt to conciliate the children. Here was a chance to take one at a time. But Nan had a fiery tongue as well as a fiery heart, and might meet his overtures with scorn. Thinking thus, Rob was somewhat relieved to recognize the far-off look in the eyes that turned upon him as he approached, without appearing to see him; or, as the minister would say, that saw without perceiving him.

"What are you doing, Nan?" said Rob, kindly.

"Oh, I'm just wondering," answered Nan, as she woke up from her fit of thought.

"And what are you wondering about?"

"I'm wondering about the King's daughter."

"The King's daughter!" echoed Rob; "I think you must mean the Queen's daughter. And which of them would you like to be?"

"I don't mean the Queen's daughter; I mean the King's daughter that papa preached about." Nan said papa and mamma just like the others.

"Oh!" and Rob became at once uneasy and inter-

ested: uneasy that the dreaded subject was brought up again; interested in any child that would go off alone among the hills to think over a sermon.

Mr. Leslie was lecturing on the forty-fifth psalm, and partly the beautiful psalm itself, and partly the minister's interpretation of it, had caught Nan's poetic imagination. They had reached, the day before, the verse, "The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold." Nan had not understood, but she had idealized. Half hidden in the darkest corner of the high, wide pew, her eager face motionless against the faded crimson hangings, her glowing eyes fixed upon the preacher, she had seen at once less and more than had been intended. She had a vision of a sunnier land than dark, melancholy, though dearly loved Scotland—a land of gorgeous coloring and tropic warmth and fulness. And throned in this fair country, she had pictured the beautiful young princess — like Tory, perhaps, but dark and regal instead of fair and angelic, and clothed in purple and fine linen, and gold and jewels. This was what Nan saw; and even thus the lot of the King's daughter seemed to have fallen in pleasant places; but at the same time she dimly comprehended there was something she did not see which enhanced the happiness and the glory.

But Nan never liked the trouble of putting her thoughts into words; and had she expressed them, they would have been an unknown language to mat-

ter-of-fact Rob. So the latter, with the best intentions, poured out a dry "explanation" that, as Nan said, "blurred her thoughts" and sent her off in search of bluebells for mamma. And Rob, a little discouraged, took his solitary way to Brownie's Burn.

Burn was surely a misnomer for a stream of clear fresh water that seemed to issue directly from the rock, and after filling the circular basin it had hollowed out for itself, fell into the sea. When the tide was out it could be reached by the sands; when the tide was in it had to be climbed down to from the braes above; and a ticklish climb it was. It was a favorite spot for young anglers like Davie. As Rob neared the place he heard the sound of many voices, Davie's above all the rest. A pile of shoes and stockings lay on the edge of the brae, and looking over, Rob saw about a dozen boys, his brothers among them, sitting on perilous points, their bare legs dangling over the waves that dashed against the rocks beneath. Rob had quite made up his mind to be friendly. What could be a better beginning than a practical joke?

So drawing quickly back out of sight, he possessed himself of the entire pile of shoes and stockings, intending to secrete himself where he might see and hear the horror of the boys; to reappear, of course, before the joke had been carried too far.

Now it so happened, though Rob did not know it, that the Brownie's Burn had, for some misde-

meanor, been forbidden to Colin and Davie for a week. And as ill-luck would have it, Daft Geordie, who always formed a part of Davie's "tail," when he could do so without peril to his own precious neck, had been lying among the corn watching Rob's movements with the greatest interest. So the moment the practical joker was concealed, Geordie stole to the edge of the brae, and by means of bits of turf, signals, and fearful contortions of his already doleful visage, succeeded in bringing the entire party up in silence, and showing where the supposed foe was concealed. The theory was that Rob had taken the articles as evidence to be used against them. The surprise of the ambuscade was immediately planned and executed.

Imagine Rob's feelings when seized from behind by half a dozen strong hands, while Davie, white with passion, appeared in front of him hissing "Talepat!"

Rob's good resolutions stood out fairly well. "Why, my dear boys—" he began—an unlucky beginning savoring too much of his seniors, and howled down at once. Rob persevered, however, and told his tale.

"It's a lee!" shouted little Archie Campbell. "It's a lee!" cried all but Colin in chorus. And Davie, looking at him with a fine scorn hard to bear from a younger brother, said, "Coward!"

Rob's high resolves fled, and with them his English. "Ye little deevil!" he roared, "I'll lick ye

within an inch o' your life!" And he broke from his tormentors.

But one, even if a hero, can scarcely lick twelve. Rob showered blows on every side, but without effect. Again he was seized, and the boys having first gagged him, proceeded to hold a council of war.

By this time Colin had relented, and proposed letting him off. "If ye say anither word," said Davie, "we'll serve ye the same!"

The difficulty seemed to be to find something bad enough. Daft Geordie, who had viewed the proceedings with the keenest delight, had a plan. "Let's cut aff his heid!"

The sight of Geordie suggested to Davie a punishment which he thought would touch his brother in the tenderest point. Geordie, though a fool, was kept by a hard-working mother cleaner than many of a class above him. "Let's mak' him and Geordie change claes!"

This was received with acclamation. "Strip!" said Davie to Geordie. No sooner said than done.

Rob was purple with rage, but never surely was rage so impotent. His hat was nowhere to be seen; the spectacles had fallen to the ground, and one of the blue glasses was gone. Geordie picked the spectacles up and put them on.

"Tak' aff his collar an' tie!" cried Davie. It was done; and though it was beginning at the wrong end, Daft Geordie appropriated the articles at once.

"Tak' aff his coat!" cried Davie again. It was done.

A pause followed. The boys scarcely breathed for suspense. Would their Cromwell dare give the next order?

"Tak' aff his breeks!" cried Davie. A shriek of delight that rent the air arose. Little Archie Campbell danced and whooped like a little demon, and dancing in the wrong direction, missed his footing and disappeared.

"Stand off!" thundered Rob, tearing the bandages from his mouth; and reaching the Brownie's Burn in one or two leaps, he threw himself into the sea.

The boys all knew what the danger was for both; not only, or principally, the strong tide, but the cruel sharp rocks that lay beneath! Never was such a transformation scene. Some of the younger ones began to cry. Davie was like death. He held his breath and scarcely dared to look; and yet he could not help looking. His eyes were sharp and his ears were keen; but there was absolutely nothing to be seen but the writhing of the waters; nothing to be heard but their dull roar. Poor Davie!

Was that a cry at last? Yes—no—yes! Oh, thank God! It is Rob's voice, and he is actually calling Davie. Davie descends at once, but totters so that he nearly loses his footing.

"Here, Davie! Here, Ronald Sutherland! Come as near the edge as you can, and keep cool. Take

a good gripe of Archie—that's it! Now pass him to the others and reach me a firm hand."

But though Rob's courage held, his strength, which had been a good deal tried before the leap, was ebbing; and it is no easy thing to raise yourself up the face of a slippery, perpendicular rock with the strong tide of a great ocean tugging you back. But for the presence of mind of Ronald Sutherland, who jumped up to his neck in water in a deep hollow some distance back, and bracing himself in it, made the boys form a double chain from him to the edge, Rob would have died a hero's death then and there. As it was, a few minutes saw them all safe on the brae again—Archie Campbell well rubbed under Rob's direction, and both revived by the whiskey got by Davie from the nearest cottage.

Then, and then only, was it noticed that Daft Geordie was missing, and with him the upper half of Rob's clothes. Fortunately, Davie's last order had not been executed, and for the rest Rob might have had twelve entire suits would they but have fitted. But there was nothing large enough among the dozen, and so Rob was fain to wrap himself in a plaid borrowed from the cottage where they got the whiskey.

But Davie felt, before they started on the homeward run, there was something more to be done. "Rob," said he before them all, "I'm not ashamed to beg your pardon. I believe every word you said;

and as for being a coward, there's nobody I know would do what you have done. Man," said he, relapsing in his earnestness into Scotch, "*I couldna hae dune 't mysel'*."

Could Davie's praise go further? "Hooray!" shrieked little Archie Campbell. "Hooray!" yelled an admiring chorus. Rob had won the day. The entire party formed a guard of honor to the Manse door, and thought it a great thing to shake hands with him before they left.

What Archie's father and mother said the reader may imagine. Before nightfall Rob was the hero of Strathlowrie

CHAPTER III.

The reader is not to suppose that all was play at the Manse, and that every day's breakfast had for its sequel wanderings in search of bluebells, or fishing-parties to the Brownie's Burn. We have opened on the first week of the holidays, which the children had for their own, with the very reasonable restrictions that they should observe the hours of meals and prayers, and every night give an account of the day's proceedings. After these days of grace the boys had some lessons with their father, and then for at least two hours per diem Colin's long back and Davie's proud one had to bend over beds of old-fashioned flowers or long rows of potatoes, while the little girls had their needlework or practising, and such mild domestic duties as Jean would permit. If work was, as Mr. Leslie's theology taught him, the primeval curse, it was also, he fully believed, the perennial and universal blessing, a panacea for all the ills of life, and not least for that vague discontent which will sometimes creep even into Scottish Manses. "Ask your mother to give you a handkerchief to hem," would be his command to Tory and

Nan, if either of these young persons looked depressed in his presence. If the desired article in its unfinished state could not be produced, to pull his own from his pocket, tear the hem off, and toss it to the woe-begone one, was scarcely the work of an instant. The remedy was truly magical in its effect, and like most beneficent things had even a wider influence than the author intended. If there was anything that put Davie in a state of jubilation it was to see the angel bairn set down to what she disdainfully called a "snuffy one," and forced to smile and handle it as if she liked, not loathed, it. On the other hand, when Master Davie's dark hour was upon him, and the uprooting of dandelions was the prescription, Tory was sure to be taking the air near the scene of penance.

We left the minister and his wife in the study, but their morning was not to be an uninterrupted one. A gorgeous yellow chariot deposited a pair of ancient ladies at the Manse door, and Jean announced "Miss Macalaster and Miss Grizzell, mem." Jean said this inconsequently, as if the yellow chariot were in the habit of driving up twice or thrice a day; but her mien, which was that of a turkey-cock with its tail spread and its crest up, bewrayed her.

The Macalasters of Strathlowrie were gentry of the old stamp, such as you may read of any day in the delightful pages of Dean Ramsay. Miss Macalaster, besides the glory of wealth and family, had

that of being one of the oldest inhabitants. She would be eighty-one her next birthday, she said; and I assure you she would no more have exaggerated her age than you or I would ours. She took long walks and drives while at the Castle; spent the season in Edinburgh (she had no faith in London) in a round of such festivities as the "gray metropolis of the North" can furnish; discoursed of "pictures, taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses," and in all respects seemed to consider herself in her prime. Miss Macalaster had been a beauty in her youth, and had preserved from that far-off time a delicate profile and sundry little airs and graces. Her head-pieces, for height and variety, were just wonderful; yet with their delicate lace and black velvet, and lavender satin and feathers, not unbecoming to the kindly face, with its soft peach-like bloom.

Miss Grizzell Macalaster (Grizzy to her home circle) was plain and practical, and ruled her brother and sister with a rod of iron. She was what our American cousins call a "brilliant conversationalist," having an unending store of anecdotes—not much to boast of in themselves, but made piquant by every variety of gesture and grimace. Euphemia was Grizzy's most ardent admirer, and in her presence acted the part of a very mild chorus, enhancing the fun, or the horror, or the pathos of what was being told by a weak imitation of her sister's expressions and gestures. The twain were always spoken of

collectively. *They* painted, *they* played, *they* sang, *they* were so interesting in conversation. *They* were even well or ill; for the house-keeper having been hastily summoned on one occasion by a new maid to "do something for her lady's cramp colic," rushed in to find them locked in each other's arms, rolling over and over in the bed, both apparently writhing in agony, so that the good Samaritan was fain to stand helpless, mustard-plaster in hand, unable to discern between the stomach of the sufferer and that of the sympathizer. Miss Grizzell had a way of dropping her voice in the jolliest story when she happened to mention "poor mamma," which always gave a stranger the idea of recent and untimely orphanhood; yet Lady Macalaster had slept the sleep of the just for half a century.

On the principle of counterparts probably Miss Grizzell and Mrs. Leslie were great friends, while sentimental Miss Macalaster admired the brusque, independent minister. The Macalasters were nominally Episcopalians, but were generally to be found among Mr. Leslie's hearers, taking no offence even when they heard "popery and prelacy" coupled together to receive the outpouring of the same phial of eloquence and wrath. Miss Macalaster kept the study supplied with more delicate flowers than the Manse garden furnished, and with delicate vases to hold them. She sent a dressing-gown (an article which Mr. Leslie scorned) every New-year's Day, a

pair of slippers every six months, and a book-mark frequently. The last generally bore some legend appropriate to the circumstances that had called it forth; thus,

> "And like unto a clarion rung
> The accents of that unknown tongue,"

would have reference to a specially admired sermon; while,

> "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
> Nor in the glistening foil
> Set off to the world, nor in broad rumor lies,"

would be a reminder of a city call promptly rejected. It has been said that if English history were lost you could rewrite it from a study of the English language. If Mr. Leslie's history had been lost, it might have been rewritten from Miss Macalaster's book-marks.

The Macalasters had come this morning on kindest thoughts intent. They observed with clearer eyes than Mr. Leslie's the change in his wife; and though they saw no immediate cause for alarm, they thought there should be immediate action, and specially change of air; and knowing that the minister had spoken of sending her to his nephew, a medical man settled in a pretty cottage in the country twenty miles away, they came to say that Sir Alaster was going in that direction on business, and would drive Mrs. Leslie down himself. "And you know my

brother's business is never so pressing that a day or two makes any difference," said Miss Grizzell, kindly; "so just choose your own time."

"It is just like Sir Alaster's kindness," said the minister, warmly, "and I'm sure Mrs. Leslie will be—"

"Oh, Robert," broke in Mrs. Leslie, "don't ask it! Sir Alaster is kindness itself, and so are you," she added, turning to the ladies, "but it is impossible for me to leave home just now."

"My dear," remonstrated the minister, "you could not have a better time. A little responsibility will be good practice for Margaret, and I will try to be mother as well as father. It is not an offer we should decline."

"And Sir Alaster thinks so highly of young Dr. Leslie; and Saunders at The Mains farm is to keep the cottage supplied with plenty of milk and cream and fresh eggs. And—"

"And everything that could cure me, or spoil me," said Mrs. Leslie, smiling through grateful tears. "It is only that I cannot leave home just now. I cannot, I cannot."

Just then the parlor door was thrown wide open, and Daft Geordie appeared—a sight to make Miss Macalaster cover her eyes and give what Jean would call a "skreigh:" long-tailed coat, high collar, the blue glass still covering one vacant eye, his nether extremities in a state of nature.

"Minister," he panted, "here's a judgment! Roab Leshlie's murdered wee Archie Cawmell. We'll hae a braw hangin' in Stra'lowrie!"

The minister turned hastily to his wife, and just in season. For the first time in her life Mrs. Leslie had fainted.

CHAPTER IV.

The second forenoon after this eventful day saw the yellow chariot again at the Manse door—this time to bear away Mrs. Leslie. The fainting fit had been soon over, and almost before it was, Archie Campbell's shrill "hooray!" had piped the advent of her boys—Davie brimming over with the true version of the story; but all the same the fainting fit had settled the matter.

For the first time in all their twenty years of married life, Mrs. Leslie protested against her husband's decree, and kept protesting till at length the minister got annoyed, and intimated as curtly as though he had been speaking to a self-willed child that the matter was settled. Then Mrs. Leslie said no more.

But what could make her, in the twilight of the Tuesday, exhaust her little remaining strength by wandering into every room, even up to the haunted attic? Very pale she looked after it, and perhaps a little grave, yet the smile came readily in reply to the children's entreaties for frequent letters, promises to be good, and happy anticipations of mamma coming home quite well. Margaret, it had been settled,

was to go with her—an arrangement by no means unwelcome to the little girls.

The Macalasters had indeed been kindness itself. Finding Mrs. Leslie weaker than they expected, they had substituted the chariot for the dog-cart, and Miss Grizzell was going down with her brother to Castlemain. Sir Alaster was not so old as his sisters by ten or fifteen years, and yet to the Manse children he seemed a very old gentleman, indeed, with his snowy white hair, swallow-tailed coat, nankeen vest, and ponderous, old-fashioned courtesy. It was a proud moment (we had almost, forgetting her engagement, said the proudest moment) in Margaret's life when, opposite Miss Grizzell and beside the baronet, she drove past the throng at the Corner and through Strathlowrie. At the very last Mrs. Leslie's calm had for a moment given way, and rising in the carriage, and leaning towards her husband, she had implored, "Robert, let me stay at home yet!" The minister was annoyed. "This is childish!" he exclaimed, impatiently, and signing to the coachman to drive on, he turned into the Manse ere the carriage had well begun to move; so that Mrs. Leslie took with her the thought of almost the first impatient glance and word she had ever had from her husband, and left in return the memory of a look that almost broke the strong man's heart.

But not yet. Mr. Leslie never troubled his head about what he considered nervous fancies, even if

they were those of his own wife. The shepherd of Elster Head had been to the Manse the evening before, and had been sent for to the study. And now the secret was out! They were to have a picnic, and a long, happy day on the moors, with a feast of curds and cream from the shepherd's cottage. Sophy and Archie Campbell were to be of the party. Sophy was to be the little mother, Mr. Leslie said.

Jean grumbled as much as she dared, but in her heart rejoiced. She would make a day of it, she decided, but was in a strait between two—being partly inclined to have Andrewina in and tramp blankets, and partly to tie up her face as if she had toothache—her doleful custom on high days and holidays—and sit down to tears and Pollok's "Course of Time." The glories of her mistress's departure in the yellow chariot decided it; she must tell it or die.

But where was Nan? No one had seen her since Mrs. Leslie went. Jean searched the house—"but an' ben, frae garret tae neuk," she said, but all in vain. It was Kelpie that found her at last, lying in the long grass of the slope they dignified with the name of the outer garden, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

The minister was unusually kind, but would not delay a minute even to wash the tear-stained face. "The air will do you more good than the water," he said, "and you can wash it in the first burn."

But Tory was shocked, and inclined to be cross

with Nan. "People will suppose you have had a whipping," she said.

"Weel," suggested Jean, "that's easy set richt. Jist say that Nan hasna had a wheepin' for a lang time, but that ye had a gran' ane yersel' nae langer ago than yesterday."

But Tory presently had her revenge. "Davie," said the minister, "I don't feel sure about Kelpie with old Donald's sheep. He must be left with Jean."

"Wi' me!" cried Jean. "Gude save us, sir! I wadna bide wi' him alane to be Sir Alaster himsel'. The beast's no canny. Kelpie by name and Kelpie by natur'."

"He has a fine memory, Jean," said Davie. "He minds the plottin'."

But Kelpie had settled the matter for himself. We have all seen dogs laugh. Kelpie had been on a broad grin ever since he heard of the expedition, until the fatal decree against him went forth; then never was such a piteous change. The next moment Kelpie had disappeared.

"Never mind, Jean," was Davie's consoling farewell; "we'll send him back to you. He'll get hame jist aboot the time you and Andrewina have kilted your coats an' got into the tubs. Fower bare legs will be to him what Margaret ca's an *embarras de richesses*. But Kelpie's no fickle, an' he kens yours best."

The minister never preached except in the pulpit, but he was always teaching; and, as I have said, he taught so insensibly that the children forgot he was teaching, and never thought him tedious or dry. Margaret's friends considered it a great treat to be of a walking party with him, and Sophy Campbell was a favorite at the Manse. So across the sands and over the braes they went; past the scene of Monday's adventure, about which Mr. Leslie would allow no joking; past the familiar landmarks of every-day walks—banks where wild-thyme grew, favorite haunts of early primroses, or lingering violets, or great ox-eyed daisies; out on the moors, with

"Naught anear but golden broom
And a waste of reedy rills,"

and

"Naught afar but the fine gloom
O' the rare blue hills."

The children were here, there, everywhere; as ready to ask questions as the minister to answer, but not always waiting to hear the answer. But Sophy kept near the minister, and Rob kept near Sophy, and Nan, much to Tory's disgust, slipped one hand into her uncle's and the other into Sophy's.

Need I tell you that long before our party arrived at the shepherd's the truant Kelpie had appeared—so overjoyed at what he made believe was an unexpected pleasure, so respectful to the minister, so

friendly with the collies on duty among the hills, so innocent of any intention to convert their woolly charges into mutton, that not a word was said about their parting company.

And now at last, guided by the blue peat-smoke, they near the thatched cottage far out in the headland, miles away from any other human habitation. And there is old Donald in plaid and blue bonnet, his staff in one hand, a bunch of white heather in the other, and a magnificent golden-brown collie by his side. He gives the heather to the minister as in duty bound, but is not ill-pleased when it is transferred to Sophy. White heather means good-fortune, they all know, so each has a sprig of it for luck. And old Donald looks on smiling, holding his bonnet in his hand now, and stroking his gray locks. The children see Merron at the cottage door, and have a final race in which Kelpie and Laddie, who have rubbed noses amicably, take part, and by upsetting Davie, win. Merron has just such a dear old face, and wears just such a close white mutch as you see every year in "Interiors" painted by A. R. S. A.'s who spend their summers in the highlands. How the mutch keeps white for a moment and the complexion rosy for so many years in the peat-smoke is indeed a mystery. The people in the Reverend Hugh's island have also a plague of smoke, but then they have the skin and complexion of red herrings.

And now comes the event of the day—the luncheon. Think not that though it takes place so near the cottage they are debarred the pleasure of a picnic's crowning charm—a fire in gypsy fashion. The kettle is hung on three sticks—wreckage, of course, for there is no other wood at Elster Head; the turf is ready set, and Sophy has the honor of applying the match. The fire blazes merrily—a sure sign that Miss Campbell will make a good wife, Donald says; at which innocent remark Rob, not Sophy, blushes.

And now, you who cannot conceive a picnic without its game-pie and its *foie gras*, and its mayonnaise and its champagne, come and see what simple fare may go to the making of strong muscles and sound minds and healthy, happy human nature. Simple as it is, it is an unwonted treat to the Manse children; they do not have fowl, or, for that matter, meat of any kind, every day. Sophy's pair of chickens occupies the place of honor. Sophy had brought a fine tart, too; but they agree—so simultaneously that no one knows who proposed it—to present it, with the tea and snuff from the Manse, to Donald and Merron, who live where not even a gooseberry will grow, and who never dream of such a luxury as wheaten flour. There had been sandwiches from the Manse—no crustless wafer-like morsels, but great pieces of barley scone, with anything Jean could find thrust in between—and a store of hard-boiled

eggs; but—to save Merron's feelings, the children said—these had been devoured *en route*. So now Donald and Merron are in their glory as they put on the board—that is, the heather covered with a snowy cloth—great brown dishes of perfect curds; jugs of foaming milk and yellow cream; cold barley scones, thick and substantial; barley scones hot from the girdle; sowan scones, thin and delicate; potato scones; cream cakes—that is, oat cakes made with cream; golden butter in pats; "crowdie-butter" in rolls: everything the "shilpit" looking animals on yonder hill-side could supply or their mistress's loving heart could devise. The best of all, in the children's opinion, was that the curds and cream were eaten with horn spoons. And last, Merron "masks" some of the tea they have brought her, and everybody has a cup, even the minister, who generally thinks but little of tea.

And the boys go off in a boat with old Donald to the Warlock's Crag—once a part of the main-land, but now a solitary peak, from which, as the boat approaches, thousands of sea-birds rise screaming. Donald has been gathering a store of eggs for the boys, and shells and snowy wings for the girls, in a safe crevice of the Crag; and now he brings the boys as innocently upon it as if it were as great a surprise to him as to them. And Sophy goes with Tory and Nan in search of blaeberries, while the minister has a crack with Merron. It is a happy, happy day!

And yet there has been one sad little heart among the joyful ones. Nan knows that her uncle hates tears, and she has kept hers back bravely. But when Tory runs to see if the boat is coming, and kind Sophy looks so tenderly at her, and putting her arm about her draws her closely to her side, the torrent breaks its boundaries; the aching head is laid in the lap of the sympathizing "little mother," and Nan cries as she had never cried in her life.

Is it because Mrs. Leslie has gone? That is only a small part of the grief. Nan is crying for so many things she cannot explain. There was a memory of the wistful look, of the gentle smile, of the painful cough, of the lagging step. Strange to say, these had all impressed Nan as they had not impressed Mrs. Leslie's own children, or even her husband. But Nan had even a deeper sorrow.

The heart that is old enough or warm enough to desire mother-love will always be acute enough to discover if what is offered to it be not the genuine article. "What a fortunate child!" said everybody in Strathlowrie of Nan, hearing her say papa and mamma with the others, and seeing how entirely she seemed to the minister and his wife as one of their own. Nan appreciated her good-fortune as far as it went, but she knew better than any one else did how far that was. She knew that to the minister she was as near and dear as one not really his own child could be; but she knew also that between her

and the aunt, whom everybody loved and thought angelic in her goodness, there was a gulf, not the less deep and dividing that no one but themselves—not even the minister—dreamed of it. In material comfort Mrs. Leslie would not for the world have made a hair's-breadth of difference between the two children. There were people in Strathlowrie who wondered that the penniless orphan was sent to the same school as Margaret and Tory, sharing even the extras which her cousins would never have had, but that Mr. Leslie's bachelor brother in Aberdeen had insisted on paying for them. They might have wondered more had they known of certain scraps of writing possessed by Mr. Leslie, beginning with the mystic characters I O U, and signed "Alan MacDonald." There were people who gave gentle hints that no one would consider it an injustice if Tory had a new blue gingham without Nan having a new pink one, and that the little orphan would not be ill off if she got Tory's frocks second-hand. Mr. Leslie frowned severely on such meddlers and gave them a piece of his mind, and Mrs. Leslie quietly said that Nan was her brother's daughter.

So she was. And was that then not only the cause of her care of Nan's person and mind, but the secret, too, of her want of response to the child's affection? How Nan envied Tory! How sweet it must be to be taken into Mrs. Leslie's arms and looked at so fondly, and kissed with the passionate kisses Nan so ardent-

ly longed for but never received! Poor little Nan knew nothing of her father's sins; and had she known she would never have connected them with herself. "Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children" was something she ran glibly over in the catechism; but to the meaning of this she never gave thought.

And so all through that summer day Nan carried a load on her heart till kind Sophy comforted her. Nan little knew how often she had been the subject of conversation between Margaret and Sophy until the young minister became the all-absorbing topic. Margaret's observation was as sharp as her neck was long; and from little remarks dropped by her father, as well as what she saw of Nan's ways and gifts, she had confided to Sophy that she believed the child was a genius. Sophy had a great admiration for geniuses, although she was by no means one herself; and as, in common with many other young people, she fancied a genius was a person doomed to a lot as gloomy as it was grand, Nan's sadness and tears had seemed quite *en règle*, though she had none the less faithfully tried to banish them.

And Sophy was successful. Before the party came back from the Warlock's Crag, or the minister had finished his crack with Merron, a gentle melancholy had taken the sorrow's place. How sweet it was to be at Sophy's side, a new understanding between them—something Tory knew nothing about—and watch the western sky marshal its fiery hosts! The

Manse children were by no means blind to the beauties of nature; but Nan had that sixth sense, which is possessed by the poet and the artist, of discerning

"The light that never was on land and sea."

She had the artist's eye and the poet's quick and sensitive imagination. But it is one thing to appreciate and another to express; and the extent of Nan's gifts was still to be discovered.

But was it not delightful that, just as she began to regret not having made better use of her day, a new pleasure should be at hand? "What wad ye think, sir," said Donald, "o' my takin' ye a' hame in the boat? The sea's like glass, an' yet there's wind enough to haud."

What the young people thought shouts of delight told; and of course consent was given. So there were parting libations, and what Merron called "a piece a' roun'." And then Merron's hand was nearly shaken off; and with cheers that made the Warlock Crag birds rise like a cloud over them, they sailed away.

And Sophy sang "Isle of Beauty;" though whether to the Reverend Hugh's island or the Warlock's Crag, I cannot say. And Tory, dangling her hand in the water, wished herself another Undine to call up pearls and coral at command. And Nan, who had an unending array of What If's in stock, sat silent, but not unhappy, building castles in the air:

What if those blue and misty islands were the Islands of the Blessed! What if some day she, Nan herself, should wander off to seek her fortune, and find it and fame together, and, coming back, be taken to Mrs. Leslie's heart as Tory was.

And then everybody probably thought his or her own What If, for deep silence fell upon them all. And the light in the western sky grew paler, and the hills drew about them their robe of amethyst, and the nets of the fishermen slowly rose and fell far off on the silver-gray sea.

And old Donald, tiller and rope in hand, had his dream too: "What if the minister was the Maister, an' the Atlantic Ocean was the Sea o' Galilee!"

CHAPTER V.

"WELL, Jean," said Mr. Leslie, as the porridge-plates were being carried off next morning, "how did you and Andrewina get on with the blankets?"

Jean tossed her head. "The *blankets* is weel eneuch," said she.

"And is anything the matter with Andrewina?"

"I'm thinkin', sir," said Jean, making an effort to speak calmly, "that Andrewina an' the Manse 'll hae tae pairt company. Dawvit Dick's a dacent body."

"But what ails you at Andrewina, Jean? Have you quarrelled?"

Then Jean's wrongs were poured forth. Jean was in her own sphere as celebrated for anecdote as Miss Grizzell Macalaster in hers. For ten years Andrewina had been the humblest of her clients, the most ardent of her admirers. For ten years, weekly, on washing-days, had Andrewina demanded, and Jean related, certain standard incidents, in all which the narrator had borne a prominent and a glorious part. And now the worm had turned; Andrewina had told an anecdote herself.

The reader is not to suppose that this is exactly Jean's account of the affair. Her objection, she declared, was purely a religious one. Andrewina's story had been of a "blas*pheem*ous" character.

Pressed for proof, she gave the anecdote itself. Andrewina, it appeared, had further followed Jean's excellent example in making herself the central figure. Her nephews, she represented, looked up to her as a great Bible authority—a sort of concordance and commentary combined. And one of them, having got into a controversy with a fellow workman as to a certain passage, had "cried on her to come doon the stair and settle Sandy Gordon."

The passage, it appeared, was nothing more obscure than the often quoted one: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle," etc. Sandy declared the Bible said nothing of the kind; that it would not say anything so foolish. Then they had appealed to Andrewina.

Andrewina, Jean averred, had stood up "as brazen as a grawven image i' the second commandment," and had represented herself as saying as follows:

"I says, 'Losh! Sandy Gordon, says I, ye're nae better nor a infidel. It dis say a needle, *an' a fine cawmric needle tae.*'"

"An' noo, sir," adds Jean, "if ye doot ma word, come into my kitchen an' I'll show ye the very spot she stood when she said it. An' whaun 'll ye hae her afore the Kirk Session, sir?"

"Well," said the minister, "I must know first what punishment she has had already. What did you say to her yourself, Jean?"

"Me! No' a word, sir! I jist tell'd her the Bible itsel' had condemned her. I lookit up Revelations, twenty-second and auchteenth, an' I read it tae her. An' then I says to her, 'Andrewina,' says I, '*ye're anawthemy maranawthy!*'"

"Why, there's Cousin Colin's man!" cried Davie, who had been giving his ears to Jean and his eyes to the window.

The minister rose hastily and went to the door. "Well, my man," said he, "I hope you've no bad news of Mrs. Leslie."

"Oh no, sir—that is, no' to ca' bad. Mrs. Leslie no' that weel; an' the doacter thocht ye should be there. I brocht the gig for ye, and I've just put it up at The Bull for the beest to get a mouthfu'."

Mr. Leslie was greatly alarmed, but the man persisted there was no need. It was something about the heart, he believed, but Mrs. Leslie was better even before he left.

Then the minister was cheered, and set himself, while packing his bag, to cheer the children. He stepped over to Mr. Campbell's and asked a little care for his bairns, never left without both parents in all their lives before. The children were half afraid and wholly excited, but thought everything would be right when their father got there.

Rob and Colin had gone to the country for the day. Davie carried his father's bag to the inn; so that the little girls were left with a sense of mingled responsibility and freedom to mitigate their anxiety. They went into the garden, but they could not settle to play. They would have hovered about Jean, but that important personage was moving about with suspiciously red eyes, and was more than usually short in her speech; they went up to the attic, but it had an eerie feeling. Then, I am sorry to say, they did something very naughty.

The study was an odd little room, like two narrow passages set at right angles. The inner part had for furniture only the minister's writing-table and chair and Mrs. Leslie's low seat; but its walls from ceiling to floor were covered with books: books in yellowish white vellum, books in ugly brown leather, books in Hebrew and Greek, and Latin and English—"all about sin," the children said; and the subject seemed to them more uninviting than ever printed on stained musty paper with a long perplexing *ſ*. The outer part contained a huge unpainted press, in which were kept the treasures of the Manse—the best china and glass, a small supply of wine, sundry tins of delicate biscuits, a slender stock of jam, etc. On sacramental occasions the assisting ministers were always the guests of the Manse, and the humble dainties stored in the study press were such as the last visitors had left and the next would finish. The press was locked,

but the key was always left in the door. If any marauder had ever betrayed the trust, Manse tradition had failed to reveal it.

Flitting from room to room in a listless way, Tory and Nan came to the study, and remained—not to look at the books, you may be sure, nor at the tarnished medallions hung among them, the texts on which were also "all about sin." Tory "wondered if everything was safe in the press," and thought mamma would like them to have an eye on it while she was away. Nan agreed. In two minutes they were on chairs inspecting the china.

"And what have we here?" said Tory, lightly raising the lid of a tin box. "Cracknels! not too rich for little girls. Mamma almost always gives us one when she is at the press. I think we might have one, eh?"

Nan had no doubt of it. They had one, two, three.

"I suppose these are fancy biscuits," continued Tory; "you remember when Colin had measles and we were so anxious about him, mamma gave us fancy biscuits to cheer us. I am sure if she knew how anxious we are to-day she would like us to have a taste."

Nan was sure of it. They had some.

"Dear me!" went on Nan; "here is a pot of rhubarb open. Can mamma have forgotten it? Perhaps it is spoiled."

There was no appearance of mould; but as every-

body knows appearances are deceitful, and rhubarb is apt to ferment, it required several tastes before they could quite decide.

They had just locked the press when there occurred a strange thing. The reader will remember that the two children were in excellent health, and, thanks to their little collation, in good spirits; that exactly the same impression was made in both; and that though Nan was of a sensitive, impressionable nature, Tory had never had a nervous fear or fancy in her life.

The door into the passage was wide open, so that they could hear anything that might occur in any part of the house. While Jean rattled her dishes, and swept and tidied things, they had heard her as distinctly as though they had been in the kitchen with her. Then all sounds had ceased. They knew as well as if they saw her that she was paring potatoes for dinner. In the silence they heard the town clock strike twelve.

And then there was a sound; but such a strange, mysterious sound that it seemed to deepen rather than to break the unnatural hush.

A step on the stairs! A slow, weary foot-fall they had learned to know; beginning on the lowest stone and coming up, up; making the long pause in the middle, then on again, slowly but surely, till the top is gained with that sound distinct from all the others —the resonant *timbre* that marks the transition from stone to wood almost lost in the heavy letting down

of the entire weight, as though one step more would have been impossible. Tory and Nan are gazing speechless into each other's faces—in no fear at the moment, but in great surprise. The usual rest is being taken at the top. Will the step come on?

No, it comes no farther. Then why do not the children run down-stairs as they had intended? They do not speak, they do not move. Nan's hand steals into Tory's. At last they hear Davie's noisy entrance, and, calling him up, they go down with him. But not to him, not to Jean, not to each other even, do they mention the step they have heard.

The step that came no more! Strathlowrie had a telegraph, though it was but little used. And in the evening there was flashed up the line a message to Mr. Campbell: "*Mrs. Leslie died at noon; break it to the children.*"

At noon!—while the minister, impatient of delay, was urging the doctor's horse as it never had been urged before; yet not quickly enough to banish the memory of that last wistful look and of his own impatient words. At noon!—when the children heard the step on the stair. Oh! has the disembodied spirit, ere it enters into rest, power to revisit or linger among the scenes it has loved, and take a long, long farewell? If it has, how, having laid aside its garb of flesh, is it still discerned by eye or ear? Why is it not always viewless, noiseless?

Ill news flies apace, and half Strathlowrie flocked

to the Manse. The terrible truth was felt by the children before it had been told in words. For Mrs. Campbell came over with her husband and gave sundry directions, and Andrewina, who had suddenly appeared, went over the house, pulling down the white blinds, shutting out the beautiful sunshine, and enclosing them all in a white ghastly stillness, scarcely broken by the visitors' hushed voices, that could be no other than the stillness of death. Tory and Nan felt at first almost more excitement than grief—how could they understand?—until Jean, rushing in upon them with the heart-broken cry, "Oh, my guid, kind, dear mistress! oh, my puir bairns!" opened the fountains of their tears. The little girls were glad of the company and the sympathy, but Davie would have none of them. Throwing himself on the sofa in a passion of grief, he turned his face to the wall, pulled the pillow over his curly head, and bitterly refused to be comforted.

In one of her early works a living novelist has cleverly portrayed the feeling of self-importance that is apt to mingle with a young person's first grief. Tory and Nan were much younger than Miss Majoribanks, and it was scarcely possible they should not be soothed by the attention they received. Here was Miss Macalaster from the Castle, with a dainty little basket of fruit and flowers. Here were the ministers from the other two Manses come to say a kind word and "engage in prayer" with them.

Here was dear old Mr. MacGregor, that had been one of the elders even before papa came to Strathlowrie, staying to have worship. Here was stern Mr. Campbell actually taking them on his knee, and Mrs. Campbell making them eat, and Sophy coming to stay all night with them. Here were the Hendersons of Oaklands and the Camerons of Lowrie House sending to inquire; while dining-room and kitchen were crowded with members of the congregation. The children heard the murmur of sympathy that passed like a wave over the kitchen visitors when they went out to speak to Donald, who, being in town, had heard the news, and hastened to the Manse. How strange it was to see the old shepherd again! But twenty-four hours before they had been sailing with him over the summer sea. It seemed like hundreds of years, the children thought. And then for Nan there was the private understanding between her and Sophy, and the restfulness of sleeping that night in her kind friend's arms, Tory safe beside them on what Jean called a "shake-down."

But, in the dead of night, the little mother was awoke by whispers and sobs, and going in their direction found the children on their knees together making confession of the festive doings in the study. To Sophy, who had the freedom of all the presses in her father's house, it seemed a very harmless little episode; though, knowing the strictness of Manse discipline, she wisely forbore to say so. But she

felt free to comfort the pair with promises of the minister's forgiveness, and the emphatic assurance that their great loss was not, as their consciences had begun to suggest, "a judgment" on their unlawful indulgence in fancy biscuits and rhubarb jam.

Andrewina was to stay on, Mrs. Campbell had arranged; but Jean, even in her sorrow, had not forgiven her, and Andrewina's tears were a fresh offence. Manifestations of grief should, in Jean's opinion, be as finely graduated as mourning, and here was Andrewina entirely forgetting her position. Jean's sense of decorum kept her silent for a while; but while she was musing the fire burned, till at the last she spake with her tongue: "What richt hae ye to greet and blow yer nose as if ye were ane of oorsels? Get up and put a peat on, ye muckle tawpie!"

What strange days they were that followed! The funeral was to be from Doctor Leslie's, so the boys went down to their father. Black-bordered sheets made their appearance, in which Robert Leslie requested this one and that to attend the funeral of his wife, Margaret MacDonald. Tory pointed out to Nan that her father signed himself only "Your obedient servant," whereas all the other funeral invitations she had seen were signed "Your *most* obedient servant;" and she explained that the omission of the adverb was according to the etiquette laid down for persons of the minister's exalted rank.

What struck Nan was the use of her aunt's maiden name, as is the Scottish custom. Her aunt was Margaret MacDonald, and she was Annie MacDonald: it seemed a new and near tie between them.

Mr. O'Neil came over and preached on the Sunday, and was very kind and brotherly, confirming Tory in her private opinion that had she only been old enough she would have been much more suitable for him than Margaret. And then there came a day when the largest funeral throng Strathlowrie had ever seen brought home all that was mortal of the minister's wife to be laid to rest in their midst. The white blind of the passage window was raised a little, and Tory and Nan taken up to look at the long black train winding through distant streets, that they might never forget how even in this world goodness is honored. There is in Strathlowrie a brand-new cemetery, with brand-new flower-beds and graves, and polished granite monuments. Not there, thank God! sleeps the minister's wife. Close to where the river mingles with the sea there is an old, old resting-place, where the "rude forefathers of the hamlet" are gathered round a little church, ruined and roofless, and so old that nobody knows who founded it or when it was founded, but bearing still the delicate stone tracery of a beautiful east window. On the inside of one of these walls is a plain tablet of dark stone, "Sacred to the memory of Margaret MacDonald, wife of the Rev. Robert

Leslie," and bearing the legend, "We asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest her a long life, even for ever and ever."

And when next Nan sat in the corner of the old pew—all black now where before it was crimson—and the minister, with all the ruddiness gone from his face, and all the light, except that of faith, gone out of his eye, took up his story where he had left it, "She shall be brought unto the King," the child needed no explanation. What formerly her imagination had tried to picture, her soul now understood. The King's daughter had been brought unto the King, and was even then beholding Him in His beauty.

CHAPTER VI.

The saddest thing about death is that it shows us so clearly there is no one so great, no one so good, that the world cannot get on without them. Things may not go on as they did, but they do go on.

And so life went on at the Manse, though with a difference. Everybody was surprised at the change in Mr. Leslie. People had always regarded him as rather a hard man, incapable of any deep suffering through the affections; and yet in a few weeks his portly frame was shrunken, his face pale and haggard, and his black hair changing rapidly to gray. There was no bitterness, however, and no brooding. The wife was not put away as a memory too painful to be alluded to. The children were as constantly desired to do what their mother would like, even in the smallest matters, as if she were still on her visit, expected home daily or hourly. Rob took his sad heart back to the university. Colin was placed in Mr. Campbell's office without fee, though the lawyer might have had cleverer lads able to pay well—a boon won for him by the good turn done by Rob. People felt most, they said, for Tory and Nan; and

in order to show their sympathy, paid them so much attention that the little girls were in a fair way to be utterly spoiled.

To begin with, the Macalasters had them frequently at the Castle to spend the day. It was a peculiarity of the old ladies that, unless they had some one staying with them, each of the sisters kept her private rooms till the evening, meeting only at meals. When the children went they spent the morning with Miss Macalaster, and the afternoon with Miss Grizzell — thus having all the pleasure and excitement of two distinct visits.

Miss Macalaster was generally to be found in her boudoir—a pretty place, filled with priceless bric-à-brac, and haunted by the faint sweet odors that always seem to cling about the dress and surroundings of dainty ladies of a by-gone age. The rare Indian things were further fragrant with the romance of their owner's life, reaching back to that long, long ago when she was presented, and her friend Lady Cockleorum appeared in the "Book of Beauty." Before the presentation even, when Miss Macalaster was not only a young and beautiful girl, but a romantic and imaginative one, who spent her days in a world of her own creating, there had come to the gray old castle the Prince Charming who had roused her from her enchanted sleep. Prince Charming was well born, gallant, honorable, but, alas! with no fortune save what he might be able to carve out

with his sword; and as India was a quarter of the globe where other swords had carved to excellent purpose, to India he went. He was supposed to have fallen there in a sortie, though the fact that his body was never recovered had kept Miss Macalaster in a vague suspense and hope, not even in her old age utterly extinguished. Tory and Nan thought Miss Macalaster's story delightfully interesting, and just sad enough not to be too painful. They were allowed to look at a beautifully illustrated copy of "Evangeline," and even to read some manuscript sonnets to "Gabriel," and they quite understood. Then there was Gabriel himself—in the boudoir, in the drawing-room, in Evangeline's bedroom, and on Evangeline's person; in oils, in water-colors, in crayons, in miniature. Miss Macalaster had a passion for fragrant and beautiful flowers, and a rare skill in arranging them in the antique vases and bowls. She was skilful with the needle, and, to entice the little girls into the mysteries of cross-stitch, would work cats on canvas for them to fill up. Miss Macalaster was equally kind to both children, but a little afraid of Nan. Both were fond of asking questions, but Nan sometimes asked questions Miss Macalaster could not answer; and though she had no foolish vanity, she had a great sense of propriety, and there seemed to her something indelicate in a child posing her elders.

Miss Grizzell's morning-room was not nearly so grand as Miss Macalaster's boudoir, but it was more

cheerful. No stained glass or heavy draperies was permitted to transform either the sunshine or the shadow of the day then passing into the light of other days. Miss Grizzell's amusements were painting (the various Gabriels were her work) and music. She played with delicate taste and touch, and sang old Scottish songs with a voice that had doubtless been good in its day, but whose day was long past. I am ashamed to say that one of Tory's accomplishments was singing so like her that had you not seen Tory, you would have believed the ridiculous little quavers were Miss Grizzell's own. A substantial basket of red flannel for petticoats took the place of Miss Macalaster's blue-ribboned lute. And while the elder sister let the children share her state drive, Miss Grizzell gave them the pleasure of driving themselves and her gifts from cottage to cottage in a donkey-cart, she walking briskly beside them ready to distribute when she thought proper. Miss Grizzell knew every man, woman, and child on the Castle Lowrie estate, and prided herself on being a terror to evil-doers as well as, in the matter of the red flannel petticoats, a praise to such as did well. There were no questions which Miss Grizzell could not answer in one way or another, and she asked a good many questions herself.

There was one walk the children took far oftener than any other. They could not keep away from the old church-yard.

Mr. and Mrs. Leslie had come as strangers to Strathlowrie, and for the twenty years of their married life no one related to them had been laid to rest there; so that the children had never associated the churchyard with any of themselves, even in the vague way that they might have done had they lived near the graves of kindred. And now it was not as if the mother had been laid with grand-parents, or brothers and sisters, or any one of their own race. They were all in the Manse together; mamma was in the churchyard alone. To them there was in all the world but one grave.

They used to come home with virtuous resolutions; they did not always keep them. While Mr. O'Neil had stayed they got on beautifully with Margaret. As soon as he went the old jarring began again. The children at last decided not to "expose" her, lest she should stay at the Manse always. But instigated and assisted by Davie, they did not make life there too easy for her. If she could only have had the maternal privilege of slapping them! but this Mr. Leslie wisely forbade. Once Margaret transgressed, but not without provocation. She had carelessly left on her open desk a poem to the Reverend Hugh, and a copy having been taken, and Archie Campbell engaged to fill up the quartette, it was sung at her door, which had first been cautiously locked on the outside, to the tune of "Old Hundred," Davie *lining* in the style of Rorie Saunderson, the old precentor.

Rorie had a tune for his lining as well as for his singing—a sort of iambic drawl, with a minor wail at the end, not unlike the fashionable intoning performed by Ritualists nowadays—and this was faithfully reproduced by Davie, while Tory rendered with spirit the part of Kirsty Polson's mother, whose psalmody was equally noted for strength and intricacy. But Margaret's room was in the wing, and Margaret, as I have said before, had long legs; so the window was noiselessly opened, and a flank movement so skilfully executed that the besieging party had not the slightest suspicion of it till a resounding slap on the cheek of Mrs. Polson, and a consequent change of key and air, betrayed it. Then there was a perfect roar of fury as the still uninjured trio threw themselves upon the foe. Jean's cries brought the minister; and I doubt if any one else could have arrested the combat. But other fights followed, till Mr. Leslie finally allowed Margaret to accept an invitation to her uncle's. And then there was peace, in which the vacant place seemed to make itself more visible every day.

Tory and Nan could not have explained how or why it was, but they no longer ran about the house carelessly and fearlessly as they used to do. It had become a haunted house: I do not mean in the vulgar sense, but so far as every house is haunted from which a long familiar presence has forever passed away. Everywhere seemed to linger the mystery of

death—a mystery which had come so appallingly near them, yet which they could not understand. They knew in words that the best beloved of their household was dead, but how long it would be before they could grasp the word's real meaning! They could not make her dead. She must be in the study with papa, or in her bedroom, resting, or in the attic, looking over the boxes—if they could only go and look; or she would come back if they only waited. They had been taught to be patient; they could wait a long time. They had yet to learn that there is one kind of patience never rewarded; that those who wait for the dead to come back wait in vain.

They gave up playing in the attics except when they had companions. The attics were filled with relics, many of them left from the days of Mr. Leslie's predecessor. There were tea-chests of *Athenæums* and *Edinburgh Reviews;* old mahogany boxes with brass handles, containing papers yellow with age; ancient trunks of cow-skin studded with brass nails, filled with old-fashioned finery which had supplied material for many a gorgeous masquerade. What fun they used to have dressing themselves and Kelpie! They thought for a long time they would never have a masquerade again.

But of course there came a day when they did; a day of fun—for childhood cannot be sad forever—of fun overshadowed because one of their young friends had unknowingly put on Kelpie a bonnet

they could recollect mamma having worn. It seemed to them as if they had been ridiculing her, and they sat down and wept.

Then seeing a key in a little chest that had always been locked before, they decided to look over the papers. No restrictions had ever been placed upon their researches in the attic.

But this was a little chest they did not remember having seen open. Would it have old letters of Grandpapa Leslie's or Grandpapa MacDonald's? or dry old sermons of former ministers? They would look and see. The little friends were interested too; they were collectors of stamps and seals, and thought themselves a perfect College of Heralds as to armorial bearings.

The first letter began, "My Dear Sister," and was signed "Alan MacDonald."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nan, her face flushing, "it's my papa!" Nan had only a misty recollection of her father, and none at all of her mother.

A slip of paper dropped from the longer letter. It was headed *I O U*.

"Oh!" cried Tory, "how interesting! What does I O U stand for?"

Nobody knew. They were familiar with P. S., R. S. V. P., and P. P. C., and they thought *I O U* might be something of the same kind.

"Well," said Tory, "let us see what Uncle Alan says." And she began to read aloud:

"My dear Sister,—If the old boy still holds out you will have to apply to the parson. The money I must have, or the dev—"

Tory stopped in horror, but at once recollected the presence of the little friends. There would be time enough when they were alone to tax Nan with her father having been a swearer. The thing now was to preserve the credit of the family.

"Oh," she said, "I see—it's a foreign conundrum, and Uncle Alan's letter gives the translation. Papa might not like us to see it, so let us lock up the box and run down-stairs."

But Nan had found something: a book with beautiful velvet binding and gold clasps, printed in a language she did not know. *It* was a translation; a Spanish copy of the "Devout Life" of S. Francis de Sales, beautifully illustrated after Spanish artists. On the fly-leaf was a name, *Mercedes Guzman.*

The children admired the binding, and Tory decided to ask her papa to give it to her. So, for the present, it and the papers were locked up and the attic deserted.

They agreed to speak about the papers that evening, but sly Tory having to prefer her request about the book, did not wait the minister's coming down, but slipped up to the study. The children were always privileged to go to the study with their requests.

"Papa," began Tory, smilingly, "what is an I O U?"

Papa was always pleased to hear his children ask for information; but he looked anything but pleased now. "A *what?*" he thundered.

Tory repeated the mystic characters, but falteringly.

Then it was for the minister to ask and Tory to answer. And when she left the study she took with her no translation, but a very fixed resolution never to mention the subject to her father again if she—and he—should live a thousand years. Ere she reached the dining-room the minister was on his way to the attic.

Tory had been forbidden to let a word on the subject pass her lips, therefore she could give no word of warning; so that the moment her father opened the dining-room door Nan called out, "Oh, papa, who was Mercedes Guzman?"

The owner of the name might not have recognized it as pronounced by Nan, but Mr. Leslie did. He had looked black at Tory's questions, he looked white enough at this. There was a moment's rapid reflection, and then the minister made up his mind.

"Mercedes Guzman was your mother," he said. "Now, not another word on the subject."

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Leslie's words sent a thrill through all Nan's being. That any child should live to be twelve years old and not know her mother's name may strike the reader as impossible, but the circumstances in Nan's case were peculiar. Losing her mother when she was a baby; coming across the sea to the Manse when she was scarcely four; never spoken to or encouraged to ask about father or mother, or any one or anything in the far-off land from which she had come, there was really nothing wonderful about her ignorance. In time, of course, many questions would naturally have occurred to her; but except for the researches in the attic they would not have occurred just yet.

Mercedes Guzman was your mother! The words rang in her ears and brain like a refrain. The minister had not waited to see the effect of his words, but had at once given out and struck up

"By Babel's streams we sat and wept."

It was one of Nan's favorites, but she could not join in it. *Mercedes Guzman was your mother* was

what she would have sung had she opened her mouth. She heard the psalm. She was even dimly conscious that there was something in it remotely applicable to herself. The pathos of it had always appealed to her — the captives hanging their harps on the willows by the rivers of a strange land, unable to speak for tears when they that carried them away captive asked of them a song of Zion. Nan saw it all, felt it all. The situation was picturesque, pathetic. She had wished for Tory's beautiful voice to do justice to it.

> "Oh! how the Lord's song shall we sing
> Within a foreign land?"

And now it seemed to her the situation was her own. Could her feelings have been a presentiment, she wondered.

Mercedes Guzman. It was a foreign name, and not French, or Italian, or German, or any tongue she was in the habit of hearing at home or at school. She knew that, partly because she took it for granted it was of the same language as the beautiful book, partly from her uncle's pronunciation of it. Then Nan herself was half a foreigner. It was delightfully romantic.

The minister had said, "Not another word on the subject!" but even his eye and ear could not pierce the hours that figured in his prayers as the "silent watches." So Tory and Nan made a night of it, for

Tory, too, was keenly excited over the thickening of the plot. She had a cousin whose father had been a swearer and whose mother was a foreigner! It was very interesting. Tory and Nan were in the habit of airing their secrets before Davie under mysterious initials, and the letters M. G. were at once placed at the head of the list.

But not in their minds alone did the name remain. The minister was too just to decree that a child should, for the first time in her life, hear her mother's name and hear no more. He was trying to decide just what he ought to tell her. All he knew of her mother he knew from the letters of Captain MacDonald; and his brother-in-law was a man whom, after he once found him out, he would not have believed on oath. And while he was thinking the matter over an event occurred which threw Mercedes Guzman into the background and brought Alan MacDonald to the front.

A deep disgrace was brought upon the Manse by Nan. The children were not allowed to spend money without permission, and during the two or three months before the minister's birthday there was always a special rage for "gathering up." But Nan's bank seemed growing lighter instead of heavier, and on Davie innocently remarking it, Nan had replied angrily and hidden the box away. After that it grew lighter and lighter, until there was not a halfpenny left. Nan had been anything but happy dur-

ing the diminishing process; when it was actually accomplished she was perhaps the most miserable little girl in Scotland.

She had commenced by buying for Andrewina a brass thimble, for which she had heard her wish. She did not know exactly why she had done so, because she did not like Andrewina, and of course she had to make her promise secrecy. The only pleasure was in the mere act of spending, and having once begun she went on. She bought rock, and shared it with Tory, pretending it had been given her by Colin; but this so nearly led to a discovery that she ate the next rock alone. She bought a toy, which she dared not show and dared not give away, and which she finally threw into the sea. She bought half a dozen apples, and hid herself and them in the long grass, and ate them all at once. How mean and selfish she felt as she was doing it! for everybody in the Manse shared with everybody else. When at length she heard herself called she dared not answer; Kelpie's bark, as he rushed in upon her, sounded like a summons to judgment. But Kelpie was in high glee, and Kelpie's master and Tory had come to share with Nan a rosy-cheeked apple. How astonished they were when Nan burst into tears and sobbed out that she did not want her share, that it would choke her; that she wished she was dead! But even Davie did not tease. He thought she was thinking of his mother; Tory attributed it

all to M. G. Oh, if Nan had only told them the truth!

But she did not. And one wrong-doing led to another. Nan's besetting sin was pride; and as the birthday approached she racked her brains for some way of evading discovery. And as the personage quoted in her father's letter never lets a temptation fail for lack of opportunity, an opportunity came.

The Caldwells were girls whose parents were in India. They lived with a rich, indulgent, but vulgar, grandmother; and they had more toys, sweetmeats, and pocket-money in a week than the Manse children had in twelve years. Tory and Nan thought they might have been the happiest of human beings, but they certainly were not. Sometimes, indeed, they were good-natured and lavish; oftener they were rude, selfish, and quarrelsome. Mrs. Leslie had always forbidden any intimacy with them.

But for a month or two Tory and Nan, notwithstanding the confidences of the "silent watches," had been gradually drifting apart in their friendships, as well as in other ways, and Nan, I am sorry to say, was daily at the Caldwells. She was made free of the toys and games, gorged with good things she had never seen before, and led on to tell everything she knew, and a great deal she only imagined. The bank disclosure was the last, and Nan blamed herself heartily. But the Caldwells told her the money was her own, and that it was "tyranny" not to be allowed

to spend it when she liked; and then they proffered, and demoralized Nan accepted, the loan of half a crown.

Nan was the life of the Manse that evening. And whereas she had refused to discuss the birthday present before, she now wanted it settled at once. So Davie and Tory counted their precious pennies, and mustered three shillings between them; and then Nan, with the air of a queen relieving a worthy family, produced the half-crown.

Davie and Tory were fairly bewildered; and so was Nan, with the questions they asked. But the withdrawal of the bank was supposed to have been for the express purpose of changing the base into the precious metal, and generous Davie expressed regret for certain thoughts he had had. The present was bought and presented, and then came some unpleasant reflections.

Nan had never had half a crown in her life before, and she began to wonder when she would have another. Already there was a coolness between her and the Caldwells, and her castles in the air had given place to dismal forebodings. What if they should tell!

There was really no *what if* about it; it was a mere question of time. Fate, however, was already swooping down upon Nan from another direction. Miss Christie, the bookseller from whom the present had been purchased, was an excellent friend to all

in the Manse. She had been greatly interested in the present, and had indeed given it at about half price, though she did not let the children know this. And one evening Miss Christie dropped in after the prayer-meeting to ask where they got the half-crown, which had proved to be a bad one!

It was fortunate for Nan that she was not a more experienced liar. She would only have postponed the evil day, and the Caldwells would have betrayed her after all.

So there she had to sit, seeing grief in kind Miss Christie's face, and hearing her declare it did not matter, and that they must never mention the subject again. Mr. Leslie was firm. He was sure, he said, she would oblige them by taking back an article he could never bear to look at now, and letting Davie and Tory choose what their little hoard could really pay for.

That was mortifying, but not half so hard to bear as to see the surprise in Tory's face, the scorn in Davie's, as she told what had become of her own money. Mr. Leslie spared her nothing—not even the lying in the long grass and eating the six apples. They had not been a sweet morsel at the time, and they were a bitter one now. Nan had a vague idea the minister would kill her. After Davie's white face, and flashing eyes, and smile of contempt, what did it matter? The bitterness of death was past.

There was nothing like killing; but for a time

Nan was permitted to speak to no one, and no one spoke to her. She had a little bed in the study; she walked in the garden alone; she sat at meals and worship with the others, but no one took the slightest notice of her. She was first ashamed, then hardened, then lonely and broken-hearted.

As she sat in the study one evening, thinking the summons would never come, a wild thought came into her head. She could hear happy voices and laughter below, but no one came near her. It was dark, and Nan had always been afraid of the dark, but no one brought a light—no one in the house, that is; but while she lay there, almost too unhappy to be afraid, the full moon rose from behind the hills and shone into the room, and lighted up the tarnished medallions, and rested lovingly on the dry old books. Nan raised her head, and saw the beautiful white, fleecy clouds, the dark, mysterious rocks, the silvery sea, and an excitement took possession of her that drove away all fear. Slipping noiselessly down-stairs, out at the back door, and through the garden, she crossed the stones, passed swiftly over the sands, and climbing the old church-yard gate, glided between the crowded graves and reached her goal. She threw herself upon the grass and kissed it passionately, sobbing, "Oh, mamma! mamma!"

It did not matter now that she had loved her so much less than Tory. Even so, lying out there, so deep under the sod that Nan could not go down to

her, she was nearer to her than all the rest of the world. Nan read by the clear moonlight the name —"Margaret MacDonald"—and wondered if the good MacDonald, the King's daughter, knew anything about the bad MacDonald—what she had done, what she had suffered. "Oh, mamma! *my* mamma!" she sobbed again and again. It was a protest against all the thoughts she had been thinking before her disgrace; against the romance she had been weaving; most of all against Mercedes Guzman. What was that other grave across the sea to her? Mamma was here.

It was a cold night, but Nan did not feel cold. The cool, damp grass soothed her aching head; the noise of the falling waves lulled her. She thought of her favorite psalm, "By the rivers of Babylon," and its melody seemed to mingle in her ears with the song of the sea, and gradually all sounds grew faint and far away, and Nan was asleep on Mrs. Leslie's grave.

There Mr. Leslie found her, and from there he took her very tenderly home. Such an escapade had never occurred in his experience before, but he said no word of blame. Nay, he wondered if he had not been too hard on what he looked upon as, after all, her father's sin.

Nan kept her bed for a day or two, and when she left it the questions she had longed to ask had all been answered. Her uncle had had a long, kind talk

with her, and she knew now what I O U meant, while the special I O U's from the little chest in the attic were destroyed before her eyes. The minister said as little as possible about Captain MacDonald's shortcomings, but he felt it his duty to warn her against the tendencies she had inherited. And what he dwelt upon most was that evil tendencies would be no excuse either in the opinion of the world or the sight of God for those who were given training and opportunity to overcome them.

The Caldwells received with such indignation the idea of their half-crown being bad that the minister at once paid a good one. But of course they told the story of the loan, and, half as a scandal, half as a joke, spread the history of the "conundrum." And there were people clever enough to need no "translation," and uncharitable enough to say, "Like father, like daughter."

CHAPTER VIII.

When five more years had passed away there came a wonderful change in Nan's life. But before that there had come a good many changes in the lives of some other people we know.

Rob had gone to India, and Davie was going. Colin, over six feet high now, was getting on, with a fair prospect of being Mr. Campbell's partner by-and-by. His face had paled, his hair darkened, but he was still the plain one of the family, and still, *par excellence*, the good one.

Margaret had been married for several years. The O'Neils lived in Virginia now, the going there having been hastily decided on only a few months before the marriage. Through a Virginia cousin there had come a call to Mr. O'Neil, and the young minister, always delicate, was advised by his doctor to accept.

Margaret had not improved in her married life. Mr. O'Neil was good, but not clever or clear-sighted, and so his wife completely managed him. She wrote his sermons—nominally from his dictation, but really so changing words and ideas that when Mr. O'Neil

came to look them over he was half pleased, half bewildered. She had still the keenest eye to her own interests. The circle of her interests had widened, of course, embracing now her husband, and to a certain extent the congregation, but she was still the centre of the sphere.

Besides being clever, Margaret had a way of putting things that was irresistibly funny to all except those at whose expense the fun was. She had a habit of quoting Scripture too, which, without being intentionally irreverent, had been remonstrated with by a deputation of elders' wives as a "stumbling-block and rock of offence." How nice it would be, she reflected, to have some one of her own with whom she might discuss the daughters of the land! She had discovered no one to take Sophy Campbell's place. She found no moderation among the Americans. Those who enjoyed the clever caricatures, enjoyed them so much that they hastened to reproduce them. Those who were too honorable or too prudent to repeat, were too pious or too stupid to enjoy. Her powers were thrown away.

And so, after much thought, Margaret broached to her husband the plan of having Nan. Nan had no money, and was anxious to teach. Why not come to them instead? I may add that she knew much more about Nan's family history than Nan herself did, and may have had private reasons in addition to those she mentioned.

When Margaret's letter came, Mr. Leslie gave it to Nan to read, and told her she must decide for herself. Nan knew he was doing by her exactly as he would have done by a child of his own. Had Margaret written for Tory he would have given her the right of choice; and if she had gone, would have kept Nan. But Nan had always got on better with Margaret than Tory had.

How should Nan ever decide? She had often wearied of the monotony of Strathlowrie, and longed to see the world that stretched away beyond the blue hills. But this flight was so far! There would be no home-coming, with Colin and Tory at the boat, and the minister waiting at the Manse door, and Kelpie barking a welcome, and all Strathlowrie telling each other that Nan—no, Miss MacDonald—had come home. And how could she ever say such a long good-by to them all? She could not, she could not!

And yet it would be going to the land of her birth, and the land where her father and mother were buried. And, after all, she need not stay if she did not like it. Margaret would be offended, of course; but though Margaret had asked her to come and live with her as her sister, she did not mean to be dependent. She would be something great, she had made up her mind—an artist, or a poetess, or a novelist; she was not quite sure which. Then she could come back when she would, and visit not only

Strathlowrie, but the romantic land of Mercedes Guzman. Whenever Nan thought of her Spanish strain she put on, without meaning it, a dark, melancholy look. She had written a little romance in rhyme, the scene of which was laid on the banks of the Guadalquiver. And when Tory said, "*Au revoir!*" Nan said, "*Vay con Dios!*" Enterprise and romance carried the day. Nan had said she would never be able to decide. In reality she decided in ten minutes.

The decision once made, Nan was in high spirits. It is something to have one's future, or even the beginning of one's future, settled; and then one does not appreciate what parting is when it is two or three months away. The two or three months are always so pleasant that even, putting the parting out of the question, you are sorry to have them come to an end. The misery is, they do come to an end; and as you begin to realize what that means—and you cannot arrest time—you almost think it would be a relief to hasten it. It is such misery to look even at things inanimate you have grown familiar with, and to think you will see them no more. But what is that compared to looking at the faces you have known and loved all your life—the faces that have made your life—and know that while they are to remain in the dear old places, you are to be borne off into a new and untried world. How the last weeks hasten! how the last days fly!

Nan's last week came—her last Sunday. Once again she sat in her corner of the old pew—crimson once more. And as to drowning people there comes in an instant the memory of all their past life, so there seemed to be flashed before Nan's eyes and heart all the days of all her years in Strathlowrie.

How grand she used to think the old church! She knew better now; she knew by books and pictures, and what she had heard from others, that it was not simply plain, but hideous.

It was just a great square room. The main passage ran the wrong way. A mahogany-colored gallery was supported on green "marbleized" columns, on which the eyes of Rorie Saunderson, the precentor, rested fondly as he sang. Rorie painted all the week, as he sang on Sunday, and the "marbleizing" was considered his masterpiece. On one side of the passage was a row of "table-seats," where the communicants sat on the semi-annual sacramental occasions, and where all the rest of the year the old country people loved to congregate. There was old Donald, Bible in hand, staff and bonnet at his side, Laddie doubtless waiting at the church door. There was Merron's kind old face, still framed in the snowy mutch, now with the hood of the brown cloak drawn over it. You might look the whole length of the "table-seats," and over a great part of the church beside, and see never a bonnet. The enclosure for the elders was high above the ordinary seats; the pre-

centor towered above the elders, while the minister was nearer the ceiling than the floor. Nan knew how it felt to be even at that perilous eminence. She remembered the days when Andrewina cleaned, and Tory and herself were, by turns, every one of the dignitaries. There were the Camerons and other county families in high pews like the minister's, but much grander. There were the Campbells in the corner exactly opposite them. Nan had still a great love for Sophy, but what was that now compared to what she felt for even the least loved within the Manse? Here were the dear old Macalasters at her side. They had taken the kindest interest in her going, and had lavished gifts upon her until the minister told them he would send back the very next article that came. Nan's heart was especially tender to Tory. The latter, indeed, had changed much, and Nan fancied she began to see in her young, beautiful face a little of the wistful look she still remembered so well. Since Nan's earliest recollection, almost, they had never been a day apart, and now they were never to be together again—never, certainly, as they had been. A terrible fear was beginning to dawn upon poor Nan. She was bidding them all good-by forever.

Oh, if she could only keep back the tears till she got safely into the Manse, they might come in a flood if they would! She held out bravely. She tried not to think, or to think only of funny things. She

saw Daft Geordie's dismal face turned to their pew, but though she forced herself to think over all the ridiculous things he had ever done, she had ceased to think them laughable. Would she ever laugh again? They were singing *Balerma*—a simple air, surely, yet Kirsty Polson's mother was performing unwritten accidentals, making all sorts of little *détours* where no one dared follow, and then as unexpectedly descending to Rorie's key and note. It was far beyond even Mrs. Polson's usual efforts, and Tory gave Nan a look that said as much. Nan tried to smile in response, but instead put down her head on the high table and wept bitterly. It was one of Nan's greatest misfortunes that she never saw things as they were. She either made them better or worse. Before the revulsion came she had felt herself a sort of princess setting out to take possession of her kingdom; and Tory's fate seemed humdrum in comparison. Now Tory was the princess, kept safe and happy in the beautiful enchanted land whence she was forever shut out. She did not even wish to be Tory, her lot seemed so far above her. She would be willing to be the precentor's daughter, or Jean, or Andrewina, or even Kirsty Polson's mother—singing and all—if only she might never leave Strathlowrie.

When she reached the Manse it was to throw herself into her uncle's arms and beg him to keep her. The minister allowed no such changes of mood. Nan

had been told plainly, when the decision was left with her, that once made it would be binding. But Nan, unwilling to be bound by any decision that could cost such pain, would not cease her entreaties until she had made Mr. Leslie really angry.

And having done that she took another turn. The parting was before next Sunday, to be sure; but then it was not to-day, or to-morrow, and Nan was an Epicurean. So she brightened up again, and in the "silent watches" of that Sunday night proved conclusively to Tory first, that "in a year or two, or three at the most," she, Annie MacDonald, would have won fame and fortune; second, that after having returned to Strathlowrie to be lionized (and here Nan touched casually on the noble acquaintances they would make at the Castle, and on the advantage it would be to Tory to be invited out with the lion), Nan, accompanied by Tory, would at once proceed to Spain to discover—and in all probability take possession of—the palace of the Guzmans; third, that Tory might then take her choice between a Spanish grandee and Sir Alaster MacAlaster's heir (Nan had decided never to marry herself); fourth, that each and every member of the Leslie family might consider his or her fortune made: it being simply a matter of wishing on their part and executing on Nan's.

Nan further confided to Tory that while not quite certain as to the means by which this desirable end would be brought about, it would in all probability

be by the wooing of the poetical muse, as she thought her style rather resembled Mrs. Browning's, relieved by a Byronic dash.

On these heights she rested till the day before she left the Manse, and then the collapse was so entire that she would almost have changed places with Daft Geordie himself.

And so, with love in her heart, and proud dreams in her head, she sailed from the haven of her childhood out into unknown seas.

CHAPTER IX.

The little Virginia town of Willoughby was basking in the sunshine of the dog-days. It was with lawyers (and nine-tenths of the gentlemen in little Virginia towns are lawyers) the hour when generally free from clients, they tilted back their chairs and tried dangerous experiments in equilibrium, fanning vigorously the while with one hand and mopping despairingly with the other. It was with ladies the hour sacred to the siesta.

The upper end of Columbia Street, the fashionable locality, was literally deserted. The houses there, though mostly of red brick, or of wood whose glaring white paint was intensified by green *jalousies*, were nevertheless so toned down by broad piazzas covered with clematis, Virginia-creeper, fragrant honeysuckle, and climbing roses—not to speak of the shadows of the grand old trees—as to suggest, whatever the heat without, refreshing coolness within.

One of the prettiest of all these pretty places was that occupied by the O'Neils. The original brick color of the house was softened by broad overhanging eaves, painted brown, with *jalousies* to match.

The piazza was a continuous bower. The wing had a porch that an English artist had planned. The lawn was as green and velvety as constant cutting and rolling and watering could make it; and the drive past the side of the lawn and house was bordered on either hand by exquisite tea-roses of every shade and variety.

This paradise belonged to Dr. Preston, the cousin through whom the call had been sent; and he and his sister lived with the O'Neils on what advertisers call reciprocal terms. Though the Prestons's mother was Irish, their father had been a Virginia gentleman; and Margaret was quite aware that most of the attention she received was due to this connection.

The O'Neils dined early, as did everybody in Willoughby in those days. Then Dr. Preston, grumbling at the heat, but looking in his immaculate suit of white linen the very genius of coolness, had departed to his office; Mr. O'Neil had retired to his study; while Margaret, Miss Preston, and the lately arrived Nan had, after a short chat in the pretty porch, betaken themselves up-stairs.

For the siesta in the South is no occasional forty winks, caught when you can get them, but a daily institution, for which you prepare as systematically as for going to bed at night. Your window is open to admit the air; the shutters are closed to exclude the sun; you don your airiest attire, and as the recumbent position on a hot day is fatal to

crimps and curls, your hair is generally *en papillote.*

Miss Preston was developing for Nan quite an extraordinary friendship, but she had never invited her to her rooms at the hour of siesta. "I really require the sleep," she said; "and besides, I am such a fright with my hair in curl-papers." Margaret explained, as soon as she was well out of hearing, that what she really meant was, that she was such a fright without the usual complement of hair. For this dear friend professed to be able to discern that the golden curls which in public adorned her head never grew there; while Phyllis, to ingratiate herself with her mistress, had basely thrown out hints to the same effect: "All I knows is I takes up a red-hot flat-iron to Miss Car'line ebry afternoon, and I would jest like to see Miss Car'line put a red-hot flat-iron on her own head."

Figure to yourself, then, the perfect hush that pervaded the O'Neil establishment, and then fancy the feelings with which Miss Preston at her mysteries and Nan on her couch heard the peal of the door-bell. Nan also heard the click of a lock, succeeded by hasty footsteps in the passage, and then Miss Preston, with her head swathed in something opaque, entered. "Isn't it shameful?" she said, in a stage whisper, although separated from the ringer by a long lobby and a flight of stairs. "Any one who will make calls on such an afternoon ought to have

a sunstroke." Nan laughed heartily. She was still young enough to enjoy calls even in the dog-days. Then they listened.

Algernon Charles Fitzgerald, colored, was heard parleying with the foe. "It's a man's voice!" announced Miss Preston in the same falsetto. The invader was at length repelled, on which Miss Preston retreated, much relieved; and Margaret's voice made itself heard:

"Algy, who was that man?"

A. "I dunno, Miss Ma'g't, I'se sho'."

Mrs. O'N. "What did he want?"

A. "He done want to know if we wanted our feathah-beds renoviated."

Mrs. O'N. "Feather-beds! How dared he think I had feather-beds?"

A. "I dunno, Miss Ma'g't, I'se sho'."

Mrs. O'N. "What did you tell him?"

A. "I tole him no."

Mrs. O'N. "No what?"

A. "I tole him we didn't want no feathah-beds renoviated."

Mrs. O'N. "How dared you allow the man to think I had feather-beds?"

A. "Well, ye see, Miss Ma'g't, he kep' bringin' up ole Colonel Bob Jackson's feathah-beds, an' I wa'n't gwine t' allow ole Colonel Bob Jackson's black niggahs to crow over me."

(Algy is heard retreating.)

MRS. O'N. "Algy!"

A. "Yes, Miss Ma'g't."

MRS. O'N. "How dared the man come to the front door?"

A. "I dunno, Miss Ma'g't, I'se sho'."

MRS. O'N. "Why did you not ask him, then?"

A. "Why, you see, Miss Ma'g't, he was such a tonguey man I couldn't get a wu'd in sideways."

MRS. O'N. (*crescendo*). "Then why did you not shut the door in his face?"

A. "Well, ye see, Miss Ma'g't, he was such a cheeky man I—"

MRS. O'N. "Don't say another word; you are worse than the man."

(Silence.)

MRS. O'N. "Algy!"

A. "Yes, Miss Ma'g't."

MRS. O'N. "Do you hear me, Algy?"

A. "I does so, Miss Ma'g't."

MRS. O'N. "Then why don't you answer?"

A. (*sotto voce*). "O Lor'! O Lor'!"

Mrs. O'Neil then appeared in Nan's room, and descending from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*, said, "You see how it is, dear?"

Nan thought she did, but fortunately did not say so.

Heavy steps were heard on the back stairs, and Bridget the cook appeared breathless. Post-bellum days brought their own troubles to Southern house-

keepers: the "Mammies" or "Aunties" who had reigned in the kitchen going North, or becoming so infatuated with their newly acquired liberty that they preferred starvation in their own cabins to plenty and high wages in the mansions of their former owners; while their places were but poorly supplied by voluble and incompetent Irishwomen.

"If ye plaze, mum, there's a man settin' in me kitchen, and there he says he will set till the docthor comes."

"What does he want, Bridget?" said Mrs. O'Neil, blandly. Cooks were not so patient as Algy, and Bridget was one of the few good ones in Willoughby.

"He says the Coort tould him to pick a guar*deen*, and he wants to pick the docthor because he loikes the look of him."

"A guardian!" said Mrs. O'Neil. "Is it a child?"

"It's a man grown, mum, and past fifty, if he's a day. But he's to pick a guar*deen* because he's a eejot."

"Papa used to say," put in Nan, "that it was a wise fool who knew himself one."

"Well, Bridget," said Mrs. O'Neil, "let him stay till Dr. Preston comes. If he's in your way put him on the back porch."

"Faix! it's not long on the back porch he'd stay if wanst he seen the paiches. It's something else nor guardeens he'd be pickin'! He can set where he is, mum." And Bridget departed.

"If I were you, dear," said Margaret to Nan, "I would lock the door. The man is probably more knave than fool; and it would be so easy to slip upstairs the back way."

Nan needed no second bidding. It might be one of the dreaded Ku-Klux, that she had heard of even across the sea. And then she lay down and took up her old pastime of building castles in the air.

But it was a fated afternoon. Eleanor was just losing herself in a pleasant dream when there was a rattling at her door, and Margaret being admitted, thus reproached her:

"I don't see how any one who sleeps as soundly as you do, Nan, dare lock her door. It's that awful Mrs. Jones, dear—Mrs. General Jones," Margaret added, with a fine scornful accent on the title, "come to see you, and you must dress in five seconds. I can't go down myself, for Hugh disapproves of her religion; I can't send her away, or Cousin Lawrence would be furious. I am 'in a strait betwixt two.'" (Here Margaret imitated to the life Rorie Saunderson's prayers, which were half made up of groans.) "Do, for mercy's sake, be quick. Don't mention the war, for the general shot his brother, who was fighting on the other side, and they say he has never smiled since. And don't breathe church. They are Catholics, which Hugh thinks the 'abomination of desolation spoken of by Dawnell the prophet.'" (Rorie again.) "Don't laugh when Mrs. Jones speaks of

Fawther Selby and the *Jeshuites;*" and so on till Nan descended.

When Mrs. O'Neil said that Mrs. Jones had asked for Nan she simply told a fib. Had Tory and Nan done the same while under her tutelage she would have called it a lie, and set them down to the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Mrs. General Jones had asked solely for herself. But as she disliked being hurried at her toilet, she found it convenient to state the case as she had done. The visitor being charmingly näive, Nan discovered the fib in five minutes.

She took her revenge by dashing at once into one of the forbidden subjects. She had never spoken to a Catholic in her life, but she had thought of them often, and spoken of them not infrequently. She knew they were under the Pope, and the Pope, she had heard her uncle say, was antichrist, the man of sin. But a sinful thing, as Nan had often known to her cost, may have its fascination, and this subject at once horrified and attracted her. Besides antichrist, the Woman of Babylon, and the Inquisition, it included the romantic Middle Ages, beautiful churches, beautiful paintings, beautiful music, and last, but not least, nuns. Nan had never seen a nun, but there was a lovely picture of one in Miss Macalaster's illustrated "Evangeline," which had led to much questioning on the subject. Miss Macalaster's replies had been very much like Wegg's when asked the difference between the Roman and the "Roosian"

Empire. She did not say in words that the subject was improper, but she looked mysterious, and gave them to understand it was one—unlike certain cracknells they remembered too rich for little girls. Stimulated by this, the questioners had at once appealed to Miss Grizzell, who certainly exhibited no reticence on the subject. Miss Grizzell had never been within a convent, and had never spoken to a nun in all her long life, and yet you would suppose there was not a phase of the life that was not familiar to her. She had a friend in Edinburgh, who had a friend in London, who knew a lady whose sister had joined an order; and on this young lady's "poor mamma" calling, she had found her daughter with a black-lead brush in her hand, actually cleaning a grate. The same poor girl, Miss Grizzell said, had a pair of gloves sent her by her family several sizes too large, so that warmth and not vanity would be recognized as their *raison d'être*, and she had been made to return them. Miss Grizzell further stated that their charity was only a "cloak;" that the Little Sisters of the Poor ate all the best pieces of what was given them and spent the money on idolatrous ornaments for their chapels, and sinful luxuries for themselves. And she ended by taking down a volume of Mrs. Sherwood, from whose pages her inspiration was doubtless drawn, and reading the terrible tale of "The Nun." Ever since then Nan had been dying to see a real living nun, and now she was actually

conversing with a Roman Catholic—certainly a step towards the accomplishment of her object.

For there were nuns in Willoughby. Nan had been in town but one short week, but she had already explored it thoroughly; and the discovery of a convent in it had at once given a new direction and enthusiastic impetus to her *what ifs*. True, the convent itself had been a frightful shock to her. She had seen in imagination a Gothic abbey, walled in from the world, a stretch of graceful cloisters, a quadrangle of grass and trees and flowers, with a fountain—or, better still, a sun-dial—in the centre; black-robed forms gliding through shadowy vistas, or bending over breviaries in the sunshine beside the fountain, or kneeling in the dim, religious light of the chapel. She found a high, square, red-brick building opening on the street; a rough board fence, unpainted, running round the garden; a garden, as she could see for herself when she condescended to look through the crevices caused by the shrinking of the boards, destitute of fountain and sun-dial, though it had a few fine trees. Even the three nuns whom the same surreptitious glance had revealed to her were a surprise. Their habit was not unlike that in Miss Macalaster's picture, but their faces had none of the expression she had expected—something made up of self-sacrifice, regret, and resignation; and far from gliding, they were actually romping with a large dog.

Once mounted by Nan on her hobby, Mrs. General Jones rode off at full gallop. She touched lightly on the subject of her conversion, simply remarking that all good Christians were Catholics did they but know it. "There were lots of things I thought I didn't believe when I was a Presbyterian," said she, cheerily, "but come to talk them over with Fawther Selby, I found I had believed them all my life."

Passing to the nuns, she enlarged on the charms and accomplishments of each. The lately elected Superior seemed scarcely a favorite with her. Mother Françoise was "smart," she acknowledged, but "awful high and mighty." "You should have seen dear old Mother Angie," she went on. "She wasn't a bit stuck-up; but she's gone back to Maryland." Then she asked if Eleanor had heard the story of Mother Angela and the mirror. The nuns, it appeared, had arrived in Willoughby a few days before they could possibly take possession of the convent, and Mrs. Jones had entertained them hospitably. Crossing the drawing-room, Mother Angela had caught a glimpse of herself in the long mirror; had stopped, stared, understood, and dropped in a dead faint—of horror, of course, having last seen herself when she was about sixteen; say half a century before. Nan was touched. "That's the story they tell in Willoughby," added Mrs. Jones, "but law! there ain't a word of truth in it." Nan was disgusted.

The nuns, however, were really the occasion of

the call. The widow of a Confederate leader—a hero who had joined to the religious zeal of the English Roundhead or the Scottish Covenanter the dashing chivalry of the South—was coming to Willoughby, and the nuns, being ardent rebels, were distracted to see her. It was a case of Mohammed and the mountain. The nuns, being cloistered, could not go to Mrs. Hotspur Fitzhugh; would Mrs. Hotspur go to them? Miss Preston was a cousin of the fallen chief, so to her the nuns' petition was sent. "But I've always been a little afraid of Miss Preston," explained Mrs. Jones; "so I thought I would see Mrs. O'Neil first and get her to ask. She is always so kind. Nan's heart smote her as she remembered her cousin's remarks. But Margaret, who entered just then, seemed to have quite forgotten them. Much to Nan's surprise, she engaged to get the nuns' request granted; and when Nan, trembling all over with excitement, said she would so like to go with them, Margaret laughed lightly, and said, "Why of course you can go with them. Why not?" And then she told Mrs. Jones she believed Nan was afraid they kept a private Inquisition. And when the visitor left, Margaret walked down the lawn with her, and said so many pleasant things Mrs. Jones went home and confided to the general that she believed nothing but the fear of her husband kept Mrs. O'Neil outside the pale of the Church. How Margaret would have enjoyed it had she but known,

particularly the clause about her husband! At that very moment she was engaged in reproducing for his benefit and Miss Preston's the eccentricities of Mrs. General Jones.

Very pretty Miss Preston looked when dressed for the evening. "Be, not seem," had been Mr. Leslie's motto; "Seem, if you cannot be," was Miss Preston's. She looked young, though known to be nearly forty. It was unfortunate for one so susceptible on the subject of age that her mother had died at her birth. It was a pathetic incident sure to be remembered; it was also an exact one, suggesting that just so many years as Mrs. Preston had been out of the world, so many had her daughter been in it. "Miss Car'line can't go back on dem figgahs on ole Miss Viginny's grabestone," Phyllis used to chuckle. Miss Preston's figure suggested the voluptuous, but her dress-maker claimed the entire credit of it. Her profile was Grecian, and she always tried to turn a three-quarters view to you. There was a long, deep indentation between the eyes, which she ascribed to near-sightedness, and Mrs. O'Neil to the vanity that would not permit her wearing glasses when her failing sight required them.

In mind as in person there was a difference between what seemed and what was. Miss Preston was rather clever, but superficial. She shone in conversation—not merely by saying a great deal,

but by saying it in polysyllables. Her skill in the latter was such that without being thorough on any subject, she might have talked a match with the Great Lexicographer himself and won; while by the judicious use of a few foreign words and phrases she had the reputation of being polyglotic.

But in spite of the dress-maker and dictionary, Miss Preston had a heart, and this heart was warming towards Nan. She loved to identify herself with youth: Nan was young. Then, being by no means wanting in shrewdness, she had gauged Mrs. O'Neil pretty accurately, and she was sorry for any one thrown upon her tender mercies. Nan, for her part, was greatly flattered by Miss Preston's interest. She had entire faith in the sweet smile, and the golden curls, and the three-quarters view of the Grecian features.

Mr. O'Neil, Nan very soon made up her mind, was nothing more or less than a lay-figure. He preached very good sermons; but, as I have said, he did not write them. He, too, had Grecian features (the Prestons took their good looks from the Irish side of their house), and he had that marble pallor which young ladies think so interesting. So far as Nan could discover, Mr. O'Neil had opinions differing from those of his wife on only one subject — psalmody. He could not get accustomed to the substitution of "human hymns" for the "inspired psalms." And it struck him as unsuitable, and almost profane, that the choir should choose the hymns. The minister

had the privilege of selecting one germane to his sermon; the choir from time immemorial had done the rest, and in Mr. O'Neil's opinion they did not do it well. Nan thought he had reason to complain. Fancy having to get up and announce, "Let us begin the public worship of God by singing to His praise the —— hymn:

"Sister thou wast mild and lovely,
Gentle as the summer breeze."

Nan thought they might just as well sing the multiplication table to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," as she heard they did in country schools at the North. Margaret thought it did not matter, for in her opinion there was little to choose between the hymns her husband rebelled against and the psalms of David, Scottish metrical version. And then for the benefit of her Virginia friends she would line like Rorie and sing like Mrs. Polson:

"A man was famous and was had
In es-ti-ma-ti-on
According as he lifted up
His axe thick trees up-on."

But here Nan did battle valiantly. All psalms were not like that. There was "The Lord's my Shepherd," and "I to the hills," and her favorite, "By Babel's streams," and many others. Nan liked the psalms—and psalm tunes, in themselves even; and when her

castle building embraced a grand cathedral and a more imposing worship, she thought she would still retain them. And then all Scotch people did not sing ridiculously. Nan thought of one who had sung these same old psalms with surpassing sweetness. Surely, if Margaret remembered, she could not caricature them for strangers; and yet how was it possible to forget?

CHAPTER X.

On this particular evening Mrs. O'Neil was in high feather, and discoursed with spirit of the Joneses and the Jeshuites. Dr. Preston was not present, and there is no question that her acting was all the better for his absence. She paid the greatest court to him, had much pride in parading Cousin Lawrence in conversation with those dear friends who she knew were dying to carry him off, or to oust her from Preston Place and take possession. But, all the same, he was one of the two persons in the world of whom she had a wholesome fear. The other, I need not say, was half a world away.

I fear late dinners have made Virginia teas things of the past; they are at least things to be remembered. Boiled chickens and waffles were the *pièces de resistance.* Then there were delicate Maryland biscuits, guiltless of the abominations of soda or baking-powder, beaten to lightness and whiteness by Bridget's brawny arm. There were luscious peaches, pared and sliced, and served with golden cream. There was pound cake, or cocoa-nut cake, or mountain cake, or angel cake—some one or other of the delicious compounds for which Southern cooks are

celebrated; with fragrant coffee, tea—hot and iced—and, what Americans demand at every meal, water sparkling in goblets half filled with ice. There were also in all houses of the Preston class the snowiest damask and most delicate china. Margaret was permitted to avail herself of the Preston stores, and she spoke of the family plate as if she had been a born Preston. Nan wondered what the Macalasters would think of her now. She had confided to Miss Preston the Lady Cockleorum legend, and Miss Preston had told her brother. If Nan could only have seen Dr. Preston laugh!

From the tea-table they could see Pocahontas brought up the drive, drawing the lightest of phaetons. Pocahontas was a beautiful bay mare, whose slender form and nervous movements sufficiently bespoke her gentle blood. There were many lovers of horse-flesh in and about Willoughby, and by them all Pocahontas was regarded as the most beautiful and the most dangerous of her kind for many a mile around. Mr. O'Neil, seeing her, looked uneasy. "I thought, Carrie," he said, hesitatingly, "that Lawrence had forbidden you to drive the mare."

"You thought quite right," said Miss Preston, coolly. "Lawrence is always forbidding me to do something. It would be quite uncomfortable, only that I never mind him."

"But really," remonstrated Mr. O'Neil, I feel it my duty—"

"To stay at home," laughed Miss Preston, rather scornfully. "I did not mean to tempt you this time; I am going to take—Nan."

The young minister had once allowed himself to be driven by Miss Preston, and his first act on finding himself once more safe on terra firma, albeit a good deal shattered, was to go to his study, call his wife, and engage in a short thanksgiving for the preservation of his life. Margaret regretted the delicacy which prevented her reproducing the scene for the Prestons. She had already given Nan the benefit of it, alleging it was "too rich to keep."

Mr. O'Neil would have liked Margaret to forbid Nan's going, but she had no thought of such a thing. "I am so glad Carrie will have company," she said. "She knows she can't have me with that creature. I am a pretty good cousin, I think, but I draw the line at risking my life."

Nan went, and could not help thinking the performances of Pocahontas justified even Mr. O'Neil's distrust. There was nothing possible or impossible she did not do or attempt. She went where she chose; she gnashed her teeth and made vicious rushes at other horses; she stood on her hind-legs and danced in a way that would have made her master's fortune in a circus; she ran away, but just as Nan had given herself up for lost, stopped as suddenly as she had started. Miss Preston accused everything but Pocahontas, and excused her on the score of

high breeding and good spirits. "She is only in fun," she managed to utter in one of the brief lucid intervals. Nan devoutly hoped she would never be in earnest. It was quite a surprise to her when she found herself at home again. On the whole, she thought it would not be a bad plan to "draw the line" where the "good cousin" did.

By the time they returned Columbia Street was alive. Shutters were thrown back, windows and doors wide open; ladies in cool muslins were rocking on the piazzas, or wandering about the lawns, or chatting at gates; and there was a steady stream of small parties flowing "down-town" to the ice-cream saloon. Dusk and darkness rapidly succeeded sunset, but no one thought of going within. Visitors came, but never further than the piazza. Through rifts in the creepers they could see the broad river shining in the starlight, myriads of fire-flies flashing on its banks. "Pinching-bugs" caused frequent screams; now and then a bat occasioned a stampede. But for flying and creeping things, which threatened to make Nan's first summer in America one long scream, she thought it would have been Paradise. Gradually even the flying things left them unmolested, and Nan sat gazing on God's world, which she thought very fair, and dreaming her dreams, which made it fairer still.

CHAPTER XI.

A FAIR morning in Willoughby. Margaret on the piazza; Miss Preston and Nan among the roses. The air is so still that the voice of Mrs. General Jones across the way can be heard distinctly calling "Fawther!" The general, since retiring into private life, is given to taking his ease in his inn.

Nan is in a state of repressed excitement. Her face is transfigured. Miss Preston looks at her in surprise, and says, "Why, child, you look almost pretty this morning." Margaret laughs. "Oh, we are all accustomed to Nan's far-off look," she says.

Aunt Sally, a sort of privileged character in Willoughby—spoiled by the whites and revered by the blacks—is seen coming round from the back regions, rolling her eyes, showing her teeth, bowing and courtesying, and uttering divers salutations and benedictions. All which, being interpreted, means that a boon is about to be asked.

Miss Ma'g't is severe at first, but is mollified by being pronounced "fair-complected." The two among the roses hear, and Miss Preston says, *sotto voce*, "Don't you wonder how even a negro can tell such a—lie?"

The request out at length leaves much to the donor's choice. Aunt Sally desires a handful of flour, or an egg, or a spoonful of sugar, or a "scrap o' short'nin'"—any or all of the materials of a cake.

"Mis' Ginral Jones," she artfully threw in, "done gib me a whole big cake. But law! Miss Ma'g't, 'tain't no time at all sence the Joneses was jest pore white trash."

Mrs. O'Neil asked the occasion of the festivity.

"Well, you see, Miss Ma'g't," she replied, with dignity, "us cullud pussons is gettin' married now jest like white folks; and as my ole mammy 'll be eighty de day after to-morrow, we thought we'd gib her an' father a weddin'."

"But I thought old Chloe was bedridden," said Mrs. O'Neil.

"So she is, shore, an' she hain't a toof in her ole head. But law! Miss Ma'g't, honey, that don't hindah her likin' a weddin'. She can eat cake like a good fellah."

Margaret looked stern. Her fun was all for her equals. And she would at once have delivered Aunt Sally a homily on holy matrimony, the point of which would have been that, under the circumstances, it was an occasion for humiliation and prayer rather than cake and lemonade, but Miss Preston bore Aunt Sally off, and gladdened her heart by promising that she herself would send a cake, while Nan would take Aunt Chloe a wedding-present.

Beside the kitchen porch Phyllis, a pretty mulatto, was waiting eagerly. "Oh, Miss Nannie," she said, shyly, "do you think Miss Ma'g't would mind if Aunt Sally told my fortune?"

Nan gave the opinion that it was rather early in the morning for fortune-telling, and that Mrs. O'Neil would probably think servants should be at their work.

"I got my up-stairs done, ebry bit, an' I hain't got nuffin to do for de nex' half hour," pleaded Phyllis. "Oh, *please*, Miss Nannie!"

"Why don't you just have it told then?" asked wicked Nan.

"I would," said Phyllis, frankly, "but last time Miss Ma'g't done cotch me."

A white morning-dress showing at the china-closet window just then, Nan preferred the request. It was never easy to count on what Mrs. O'Neil would do in any case. In this one she gave her consent, and with it a new silver quarter with which to cross Aunt Sally's palm, but immediately spoiled the gift by demanding a *quid pro quo*. "I will hear the fortune," she said, "to be sure you put no nonsense in that silly girl's head."

"Miss Ma'g't, honey," protested the fortune-teller, "it can't be done nohow—not if I was nebbah to see a twenty-five cents again. De words wouldn't come. An' it would bring awful luck to dis yer pore yaller gal. Mought jist as well put her in her coffin."

"O Lor'!" ejaculated Phyllis, her rich brown paling.

Of course Aunt Sally had her way; and Nan, returning to the roses, watched the pair as they stood under a spreading tulip-tree—Sally, tall and black, with snowy starched turban and scarlet neckerchief, delivering her oracle as though it had been inspired, and pretty Phyllis, nothing doubting that it was, devouring every word.

"Ye'll be happy in de long-run," Aunt Sally at last summed up, "but dah's trubble fust, chile."

And there was! Mrs. O'Neil's walking-boots were found minus a button, and Phyllis was summoned to answer for it.

"Now," Mrs. O'Neil said, "I have paid that quarter to show you the folly and the sinfulness of fortune-telling. Any one who so much as mentions it again in my house will be dismissed on the spot."

It was yet early in the forenoon when four ladies were admitted to the convent. Mrs. Hotspur Fitzhugh, the daughter of one uncompromising Presbyterian and the widow of another, had little sympathy for anything Romish, but she appreciated the homage paid to her dead hero through herself, and was willing to give the nuns a pleasure. Miss Preston had an air of mingled patronage and doubt. Since her cousin's fame had made his widow a lion she was willing to show the lion off. But then in the ante-bellum days her father had been the great personage, and had patronized Hotspur while the latter was

but a poor young man with his own way to make in the world. The situation was confusing. Nan was as we have described her. As for Mrs. General Jones, she was fairly rampant. She saw in vision the entire trio, with Mr. and Mrs. O'Neil besides, brought into the true fold, and herself, the humble means of such a conquest, the recipient of an autograph blessing from the Holy Father.

The ladies had been taken past the parlor, with its forbidding grate, into an inner room, where they might be hand to hand as well as face to face with the nuns. To them entered presently a black-robed train, the Superior at the head.

How long Mother Françoise had been in the cloister Mrs. Jones had not said; but there was an indescribable grace in her air and movements. The introductions performed by Mrs. Jones were as awkward as possible, so that, save for her widow's garb, no one could possibly have told which was Mrs. Hotspur. But Miss Preston was equal to the occasion. Putting on her best manner, she took her cousin's hand and courteously presented her to Mother Françoise; and the mother, her dark eyes filling with tears, gently clasped the widow in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks.

While the Superior and Mrs. Fitzhugh conversed with mutual pleasure, the nuns, some pretty, some plain, seated themselves in a row, their eyes fixed on the ground; Mrs. General Jones, at the end of the

line, paying special court to an old nun who sat next her, and acting as a sort of wall between the cloister and the world. But Miss Preston again came to the rescue.

"Come, come, Mrs. Jones," she said; "you can see the sisters at any time, but this is a red-letter day to us." And forthwith they were all rearranged and chatting in comfortable little groups. Then three of the nuns sang, and the visitors were shown the house and garden, and were pleased with everything.

Often Nan's eyes turned to the Superior, and the attraction seemed mutual; yet in some way, whenever there seemed a chance of special speech between them, Miss Preston interposed. But Nan's quick eyes and quicker susceptibilities scarcely needed words on either side. Mother Françoise had won her heart—in a moment and forever. And being a partisan, as all enthusiastic people must be, Nan began to range herself already on the side of the nuns in the discussions that she foresaw would follow the visit. "Wicked," "deceitful," and "bigoted" were terms she had heard invariably applied to Roman Catholics in general, and nuns in particular. Nan scanned the group even as she laughed and talked, and tried to decide impartially. There was an old nun whom she scarcely fancied. Nan thought Sister Anastasia *might* be "deceitful;" and she was sure she was "bigoted," because, when the bell struck the hour, she broke off so abruptly from the person

who was talking to her, and kept crossing herself and shaking her head long after the other nuns had resumed conversation. "She is a 'Jeshuite,'" decided Nan. What a contrast to Mother Françoise, who had listened courteously to Miss Preston till the latter, noticing the silence, had stopped speaking! "She is a lady," said Nan, mentally, as she noticed the little politeness; "and a saint," she added, as she saw the holy, rapt look with which she said her prayer. "Oh," her thoughts ran on, "I wish I knew the prayer she says, and I would say it all my life for her sake!"

Did the Superior read the thought? Already she knew far more of the Prestons, O'Neils, and even of Nan, than any of her visitors guessed.

Just before leaving they went again to the garden to see a particular kind of tea-rose with which Miss Preston had been unsuccessful; and Nan took a fancy to wander off by herself. As she stood in a far-off corner at the entrance to a grotto a hand was laid on her shoulder, and turning she found herself alone with Mother Françoise. Each looked long at the other. Nan could not speak. Had she tried she would have burst into tears. It was as though there had come to her the apocalypse for which she had been waiting all her life. At length Mother Françoise drew her within the enclosure, and softly said, "Here, in the Oratory of our Lady, I would like to give you a loving kiss."

CHAPTER XII.

When Nan reached Willoughby she had been delighted to find that the Prestons were Episcopalians. True, her uncle had in theory classed Episcopalians and Catholics together; but in practice he thought very highly and spoke very warmly of the Macalasters, as well he might. Nan, therefore, came to the conclusion that while both Popery and Prelacy were sins, the latter was a pardonable and the former an unpardonable variety of sin. And while she listened to Mr. O'Neil's sermon that first Sunday morning, she was wondering if she would ever have courage to ask to go with Miss Preston—not yet, of course, but in that future to which Nan was always consigning what she found it inconvenient to do at once.

Judge then how bewildered she was when at dinner Miss Preston said, "You must come with me this evening, Nan;" and Mrs. O'Neil at once coincided. Mr. O'Neil had made a faint protest by asking what Mr. Leslie would say, and Margaret had turned the tables by asking what Mr. Leslie would say to a read sermon. So Nan went, and afterwards found she might go as often as she chose.

Perhaps, had it been a forbidden pleasure, Nan would have enjoyed it more. In itself, she could not help thinking, there was not much very enjoyable. Virginia Episcopalianism was a little behind the times.

St. Mark's, Willoughby, groaned under the incubus of a phlegmatic rector—a man who had been so long physically bilious that he had at last become mentally and morally so. He had set out in life with fair prospects and more than fair abilities, and now the utmost that could be said for him was that he meant well. A man is damned by such faint praise. It means that he is an utter failure.

Mr. Tolivar was a large, doughy-faced man, given to slangy ways of speaking and untidy ways of looking and acting. He had a taste for law, and spent three-fourths of his time in the Court-house. Forced to be a listener there, he was an incessant talker elsewhere. He was not a "brilliant conversationalist," but he was a plodding and a persevering one. His devotion to the Court-house left him little time for pastoral visits, but every visit was a visitation. A gossiping wife and half a dozen ill-bred boys did not add to his popularity. He was, indeed, kept in Willoughby solely by the influence of Miss Preston's uncle; and under his pastorate the male members of his congregation had gradually dropped off till *Dearly beloved Brethren* meant little more than *Dearly beloved General Fitzhugh.*

As for the church, an inscription on the outside declared it to be "The Church of the Living God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth;" but the stranger who compared the accessaries within with the inscription without was apt to express himself severely. There was a triple erection at the east end—the high middle division serving as pulpit, and the others as reading-desks; and in front of these was a neglected table, beneath which reposed all the week a broom and dust-pan. At the west end there was a gallery, which accommodated a superannuated organ, and a mixed choir so much addicted to those jealousies which are said to prevail in the musical world that you could never be certain who composed it. Mr. Tolivar wore a black gown when he preached, and a surplice, which was of anything but "fair white" linen, when he said prayers; and preaching, or praying, or administering Holy Communion, he shuffled about in a pair of faded embroidered slippers, down at the heels, which flapped audibly at every step. The rector called himself a High-Churchman, which only shows how little there is in a name.

Nan had once thought it would be delightful to soar into Episcopacy. Now she compared Mr. Tolivar and Mother Françoise, and dreamed of a higher flight.

On the return from the convent, Nan wished above everything to be alone; to abandon herself to thoughts of that graceful and gracious one who, she

felt, would be the inspiration of her life. But Miss Preston had enjoyed the nuns, and Mrs. O'Neil wished to hear about them, so they lingered long after dinner discussing them. Nan joined in praising the singing and abusing old Sister Anastasia; but she kept the thought of Mother Françoise in her own heart. But Miss Preston did not lack astuteness; so when they went up-stairs she called Nan into her room and said, "I was going to offer you some flowers for Mother Françoise, but I see you don't care about her." And then Nan opened her heart, and under the skilful questioning of her friend told her every thought and feeling, and how Mother Françoise seemed to her as the Angel of God.

The note that sent the flowers said little, but it had as postscript a request; and the note that came in reply said little, but it had a line enclosed which Nan kept to herself. Not till bedtime had she a chance to look at it, and then, after a hasty glance, she fell on her knees and prayed:

"Let the adorable name of Jesus be the sweet and daily music of my life and the seal of my heart. And when in the agony and cold sweat of death I give the last look for mercy, may the parting sigh of my soul be Jesus!"

Then Nan kissed the paper and put it under her pillow. She had asked for, and Mother Françoise had sent, the prayer with which the nuns had marked the hour.

CHAPTER XIII.

You remember how the old woman in a certain nursery rhyme, being doubtful of her own identity, resolves to test it by the sagacity of her "little dog." Nan might well have wondered whether even Kelpie would know her in the new world into which she had been launched.

In most respects it had been for her a veritable plunge into fairy-land; and the situation was all the more pleasant that it was quite a surprise. In the first place she had had no idea of Margaret's position and circumstances. She knew that the minister, and the Campbells, and other friends had considered Mr. O'Neil an excellent match; but then, on the other hand, the Macalasters had thought the Lady Cockleorum's neck might have stretched even higher. She knew the Prestons shared the O'Neils' house, or *vice versâ*, but she had innocently supposed that the arrangement was like that in some of the Strathlowrie houses, when one small family took the ground and another the first floor. And though Margaret had in her letters indulged in a good deal of glorification as to the attentions paid to her husband and

herself, she had supposed this owing to their popularity. Margaret's real position quite bewildered her.

And then her own lot was more bewildering still. The minister had desired her to go on with her studies. "Remember, my girl, you have only begun to learn. Get Hugh to keep up your Latin, and Margaret your music; and whenever you have a spare hour, give it to your books." Nan had expected that Margaret would be very strict with her, and would require a good deal of plain-sewing—of which she was not very fond. And as for society—she had never expected to know anything about that until she began to be famous. She had anticipated a round of prayer-meetings and missionary meetings and temperance meetings; and instead of that she was going to have a round of real parties. The coming of Mrs. Hotspur Fitzhugh, just emerged from the seclusion of her widowhood, had been the signal for a series of festivities among the grandees of Willoughby—the innumerable Fitzhugh tribe taking the lead. And Margaret had decided that as there were girls younger than Nan in society, she might as well "make the plunge," as she expressed it, at once. And there, thought Nan, was Tory in the old Manse, studying, sewing, balancing house-keeping accounts, in which the minister's lynx eye permitted no "sundries;" her amusements a day with the old Macalasters, or a dinner at Mr. Campbell's, or a "soirée" in the church,

with a paper bag of buns and weak tea unlimited, all for the trifling consideration of sixpence.

And yet when Nan thought it over—which was not often—she could not help fancying that Margaret was even less satisfactory than she used to be. She had not been cross to her yet, and to the Prestons she was invariably suave; but to the servants she seemed always cross and unreasonable. Nan had, of course, discovered that the days of negro whippings against which she had been prepared to testify were over; but she thought the continual scolding almost more trying than blows. And then, in regard to herself, Margaret had a way of sneering at her cherished beliefs, and of throwing cold water on her enthusiasms, that often made her unhappy. To sensitive Nan a word or two would suffice, particularly if accompanied by Margaret's sneering laugh. Nan was quoting Mr. Leslie to Miss Preston one day, and called him "Papa," as she had always done. "Oh," said Mrs. O'Neil, "do you keep up that habit yet?" And then to Miss Preston, "She means my father." Nan blushed and stammered, her eyes filled with tears; the tale came to a lame and impotent conclusion, and after that Mr. Leslie was always "Uncle Robert." Then, though Margaret got her the necessary dresses, it was Miss Preston who was interested in the making and fitting, and all the little details of her gala attire. Nan remembered how everybody in the house used to gather about and admire mamma

on the rare occasions when she was to dine at the Castle; and how the children never thought of going to any little festivity without displaying themselves to everybody in the house. Why, even the scapegrace Davie used to be interested in the muslin frocks and the sashes. And now if Margaret said anything, it was very apt to make Nan feel rather uncomfortable than otherwise: "For goodness' sake, Nan, don't look as if you had swallowed a poker!" And then she would imitate Miss Macramrod: "The edge of your chairs, young ladies, and feet in the first, third, or fifth position." Nan thought of the past and its poor little fineries with a tender regret.

But not for long. She had wished to win fame and fortune, so that the world might pay court to her, and lo! the world was paying court to her already. Then she had the Prestons to soften Margaret's asperities, and she had the thought of Mother Françoise always present. So that she spent half her time in the world of frivolity, and the other half in the world of romance.

CHAPTER XIV.

General Fitzhugh, the Prestons' uncle, was the great man of Willoughby, and his descendants pervaded the place. There were Colonel Fitzhugh and Colonel Preston Fitzhugh, and Judge John and Judge Harry—all the old general's sons. Dr. Preston confided to Nan that the only thing that made him regret having taken his degree was the title it conferred; as his life-long ambition had been to be the only untitled person in Willoughby. As it was, his professional rank seemed, in the eyes of both white and black, a poor thing when weighed against the civic and military honors of his relations; and to Algernon Charles Fitzgerald in particular this had been the occasion of innumerable heart-burnings and "crowings over." That a rising physician and scientist like Dr. Lawrence Preston should settle in little Willoughby, even though it was his birthplace, was matter of surprise to every one but his fellow towns-people. His scientific friends in Germany, where he had studied, thought him mad to return to the New World at all. Among religious people he had the reputation of having brought home some very strange opinions. No one could tell exactly

what they were, so no one knew exactly what to call him—doubter, deist, atheist—the convenient term agnostic not being yet in common use. Mothers with marriageable daughters shook their heads when his name was mentioned, and said it was "so sad," yet none the less courted him for a son-in-law. They had charity enough to distinguish between the sin and the sinner. Did not the apostle say that the unbelieving husband might be sanctified by the believing wife? And dear Minnie or dear Georgie had always been such a devout darling.

Notwithstanding his reputation, there was nothing Mephistophelean in the appearance of Lawrence Preston. A tall, broad-shouldered, straight-limbed man of thirty or so, with frank blue eyes, set in a clear-cut, resolute face, closely cropped curling fair hair, and rather long beard, there was something in his appearance most attractive and winning. Looking at him, you got the impression that he would laugh at the worst that could be said of him. And he did, heartily. For, after all, what could be said? His version of the matter was, that people gave themselves an immense deal of trouble to find out what his religious opinions were, while his real crime was an entire absence of religious opinions. He neither scoffed at religion nor religious people. And while he had very definite opinions in matters of taste—Mr. Tolivar and the "human hymns" included—he generally kept them to himself.

In the society of Willoughby there had really been more prejudice against Dr. Preston's politics than his religion, or want of religion. It had at first almost broken his sister's heart that he, a Virginia Preston, should be politically a Yankee. In her opinion the entire State had been too lukewarm; she would have liked it to breathe hate and defiance and undying hostility—like South Carolina. And now here was her own brother, with the proudest blood of the South in his veins, turning against them all —a Brahmin losing caste was nothing to it. So all Willoughby thought. To the average Southern mind of that time a New Englander would never be what our neighbors across the Channel call a *person born;* and the people of Willoughby, not being as far south as they would have liked to be, thought it their duty to be terrible fire-eaters. How the young doctor enjoyed it when he knew that society had once proposed to ostracize him! But for Mrs. O'Neil he never would have known it. But she, having adopted from the first the aristocratic side of the question, had been the recipient of certain confidences in regard to the misguided young man. Mrs. Benjamin, a tall, angular woman, who did her best to hide a really kind heart under a thousand ridiculous pretensions, imparted to her that she felt strongly on the subject on account of her growing family of daughters, who would soon be old enough to enter society. Of course Margaret told the Prestons, and

Miss Preston was so indignant at the thought of her rich, handsome, and distinguished brother condescending to cast a thought on the pert, tadpole-like Benjamins, that she was afterwards not half so bitter against him. Then an elderly young lady, who during the war had so glaringly insulted the Union officers that she was put in ward till she had taken the oath of allegiance (her contumacy lasted exactly twenty-four hours), used to make a wide *détour* whenever she saw Lawrence approaching, drawing her skirts ostentatiously aside as though to prevent his touching the hem of her garment. She did this till Miss Preston calmly cut her before the eyes of assembled Willoughby; and then she made the *détour* no more.

There was, in truth, such a sad lack of eligible young men in Willoughby that the mere fact of being one might have covered a multitude of sins. This scarcity was put down to the war. A fearful calamity farther east and farther south, the "late unpleasantness" was to places like Willoughby a perfect godsend. Was an income scarcely large enough to make both ends meet? The war! Was there plated stuff instead of plate? The war! Was a husband given to dissipation? The war! Was a wife's temper soured? The war! Above all, was a lady fading into the sere and yellow leaf, with never a prospect of matrimony? The WAR! There was not an elderly young lady in town the reproach of whose single estate was not taken away by some phantom lover.

CHAPTER XV.

The eve of old Chloe's wedding found Nan at Aunt Sally's with the promised present. As she made her way to the corner where the negress lay under a gay patchwork quilt, Dr. Preston rose from beside the bed and greeted her. The bride, by tasting the entire collection of cakes, had brought on a "misery," and scorning the services of her kinsman, Dr. Coffepot, had insisted on having "Marse Lawrence."

The bride was by this time convalescent, or, as she described it, "tol'able peart." Her face was about the size and shape of a small monkey's; her eyes rolled with festive anticipation; her hair was plaited in a hundred small tails, in preparation for the morrow, according to the universal custom of negroes, whose great ambition seems to be to add to their general crimpiness.

Aunt Sally regarded the mammy critically. "She'll do fust-rate, honey," she said to Nan, "if I can only git her some store flowers for a wreath."

"How will this do?" asked Nan; and opening the parcel, she displayed a structure—half cap, half

turban—made of soft gauze, with a spray of orange-flowers. There was a neckerchief to match.

Of course old Chloe would try the finery on. And then she chuckled till she choked, so that Aunt Sally had to pull her up, and slap her on the back, and shake her; under cover of which excitement Nan and Dr. Preston made their escape; not, however, without the former being taken aside to see the new five-dollar greenback the young doctor had given the mammy. "He done tole her 'twas his fee," laughed Sally. "Law! Miss Nannie, there ain't no Yankee about Marse Lawrence."

No sooner were they fairly off again than a halt was called, and Dr. Preston intrusted with two articles—one for Nan, the other for himself—done up in white paper and tied with white ribbon. The packages were to have been sent after them, as Sally took care to explain, but mammy had insisted on their being delivered at once.

"The plot thickens," said Dr. Preston, when at last they were fairly off. "Do you think it is bride's cake?"

"No danger of mammy allowing that to escape her," laughed Nan. "But let us see."

It was not bride's cake, but a copy of the wedding hymn, painted, framed, and glazed. The bridegroom drove a water-cart and composed "hymes," and the one for the happy occasion was his work. There was a stirring chorus—

"Now let us all of color join
In Christian love to pull,
And let the host of Satan still
Pronounce our hair as wool!"

The doctor roared. "What a glorious chance the host of Satan will have to-morrow! Fancy that little old face, about the size and color of a cocoa-nut, looking out from a mountain of white wool!"

"You forget how the wool will be toned down by my turban," said Nan. "And I have no doubt your five dollars will go for more finery."

"No," the doctor laughed; "that is safe for water-*millions*. I dare say Chloe will be beyond my skill the day after to-morrow."

It might have added to the amusement of Nan and the doctor to know that the wool was further toned down by the neckerchief being attached to the cap and worn as a bridal-veil. Meantime, though they laughed, each admired the true kindness of the other, so that Chloe's wedding really began their friendship.

Dr. Preston proposed a walk, but Nan had to hasten home to dress for a party at Colonel Fitzhugh's. Colonel Fitzhugh was the general's favorite son; but though he had lately celebrated his silver wedding, his wife had never entered her father-in-law's house. She had been a beauty in her way—a bold, gypsy way; but the beauty had waned and the boldness waxed. She always spoke of the

colonel as having run away with her, but everybody knew she had run away with him. He was then but a youth at Yale, and she, years older, was the daughter of the keeper of a country inn to which the students did much resort. She was good-natured, eccentric, and amusing, and she always spoke of the general as though he was her best friend.

When our party reached Belleville they found a perfect crush. The hostess was in the thickest of it, commencing a performance with a black-and-tan terrier.

"Stand there, Constance darling," she was saying to Mrs. Hotspur, in her deep contralto tones, "so that you can hear his magnificent trills." Tying a ridiculous little bonnet on the creature, she set him on her knee, on his hind-legs, facing her. Then she threw back her head and began an operatic air.

The dog threw back his head and joined his tones with hers. His mistress imitated all the stage agonies, and Pluto John imitated her. Once Mrs. Colonel stopped, and Pluto John, having just got well into a shake, went on alone, and did not pause even when Nan laughed aloud, though he gave her a reproachful side-glance. The beast was certainly uncanny.

"As good as old Chloe," said Dr. Preston.

"Oh!" cried Nan, "it makes me think of Kelpie!" and rushing forward impulsively she kissed Pluto John.

"You darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Colonel; and

forthwith, much to Nan's embarrassment, she repaid the kiss with interest.

Then General Beauregard—a white poodle—was introduced, and a bit of cake sent for. Just as his teeth were about to close on the morsel his mistress said "General Grant," on which the poodle turned disgusted away. But the moment "General Lee" was said the cake disappeared. This performance excited a good deal of interest, some of the guests declaring the trick lay in the order in which the names were pronounced, while Miss Preston suggested that her cousin gave a private pinch at Grant's name. But Mrs. Fitzhugh challenged investigation; and the same result invariably occurring, no matter how the names were said, or who said them, General Beauregard retired, gorged and covered with glory.

Nan meanwhile lingered at Mrs. Hotspur's side, and was told of a lovely souvenir the nuns of Willoughby had sent her—a specimen of their own exquisite work. "But I care most for the beautiful note that came with it," said Mrs. Hotspur. "I shall keep both always."

Nan looked at the sweet, refined face beside her. It, as well as that of Mother Françoise, was the face of one who had found peace. Then peace might be reached by different ways. Mrs. Hotspur, again like the Superior, seemed to have the power of reading her thoughts.

"My dear," she said, taking her arm and drawing her into the cool and fragrant conservatory, "Carrie has been talking to me of you, and you must forgive me if I warn you against yielding your spirit to what in reality has only captivated your senses. I can see how, to one of your tastes, Romanism has many temptations unknown to a matter-of-fact person like myself. And I can imagine that Mother Françoise (whom I like much, though I do not see her with your eyes) is a thousand times more congenial to you than most people you meet, and how her religion—so much of it as she chooses to show you, at any rate—may seem more attractive than your own. But the question is, whether your conscience approves the teaching entirely regardless of the teacher. Would you be quite as charmed with it were its interpreter, say, Sister Anastasia?"

Nan laughed. "Poor old thing!" she said, "everybody except Mrs. Jones seems to hate her."

"Yet she may be the next Superior! Think of that—or, rather, do not think of people at all, but principles."

Colonel Fitzhugh was seen coming for Mrs. Hotspur. "I fear," said the latter to Nan, "we shall not have much opportunity for conversation to-night. But I must see you when neither of us shall be so much in demand. Society must not have all my time, nor," she added, smiling, "Mother Françoise all yours."

Of course Nan was pleased and flattered. Who would not have been? Here was one whom the entire South delighted to honor interested in her, seeking her. It was very pleasant.

"Well, what do you think of Carrie's flame?" asked Colonel Fitzhugh of his cousin. "I hope she is not a second edition of Mrs. O'Neil."

"I confess I share Carrie's interest," replied Mrs. Hotspur. "Nan is not the least like Mrs. O'Neil. Poor child! I wish she had a safer guide. Young as she is, she strikes me as sure to have a history. I am not so sure," she thought to herself, "that it will be a happy one."

In the supper-room, above the hubbub two voices rose; Mr. Tolivar, at the colonel's instance, was attempting to say grace, and Mrs. Colonel, whose father, the innkeeper, had been a fat old German, was asking Dr. Preston if he had ever chanced while in the Fatherland to meet her aunts the countesses.

Dr. Preston smiled. "Germany is a wide world," he said, "and one that abounds in countesses."

Mrs. Harry Fitzhugh, a frail, washed-out-looking little body, but one of the nicest of the Fitzhugh clan, was listening in horror and indignation. "To think that Lawrence knew all her history," she said, afterwards, "and that *she knew that he knew*."

Mrs. Colonel was penurious, so that her refreshments were never satisfactory. "Did you ever see such slush?" Colonel Preston was asking his wife, as

he handed her something supposed to be ice-cream. "She's a disgrace to the family!"

"Isn't the flavor delicious?" Mrs. Colonel was asking Mrs. Hotspur. Dowagers ate and drank, and fanned and talked, and Mrs. O'Neil kept them well amused; young people ate and drank, and danced and flirted. Miss Preston always danced, and danced well. Mrs. Benjamin poured out floods of gossip, but having a guilty way of keeping her eye fixed on the person she was talking about, all the world could guess pretty well who the victim was. Then, being a regular Mrs. Malaprop, she invariably caught herself telling her most thrilling stories to the wrong people, so that she was continually breaking off abruptly to exclaim, "Oh! I forgot you were her aunt;" "Oh, goodness! you're her sister-in-law." The elderly young lady who had tried to snub Dr. Preston kept her Roman nose well in the air as she neared him in the dance; and as she was more nose than anything else, it was interesting to watch her. The belle of Willoughby was Colonel Fitzhugh's young step-sister, a tall, slender girl of that rare type of beauty which unites the fairest complexion and golden hair with dark eyes and lashes and brows. Edith Fitzhugh had a penniless suitor whom the General in a rage had ordered out of the house, thereby giving a zest to meetings elsewhere; for Diaz was always obtaining interviews in order to bid Edith an eternal farewell. The Mexican was musical, and a composer, and on this occa-

sion made the sensation of the evening by singing "Tears, Idle Tears!" to an arrangement of his own. He sang with passionate expression, and every one knew what it meant. Poor Edith, in a dark corner of the piazza, listened with awe; and when, dashing into a reckless *allegro*, he finished with Byron's "Remind Me Not!" she felt that at least one more interview would be absolutely necessary, if she did not mean to have his blood required at her hands.

"Isn't it enough to make one's flesh creep?" asked Mrs. Colonel, tragically, meeting Dr. Preston with Nan in the hall.

"Yes," said the doctor, decidedly; "mine creeps to take him by the collar and turn him out of the house and out of the town — the contemptible hound!"

Mrs. Colonel gave one of her loud laughs. "My lord takes everything *au sérieux*," she said.

Nan stared. She did not know that her hostess sometimes fell into what she considered "European" modes of address—probably inherited from her aunts the countesses!

Mrs. Colonel laughed again. "I am going to take you two and Carrie to see my studio before you go," she said. "It is only my greatest favorites I take there. Don't you go and bring Margaret O'Neil!"

Miss Preston being found, seemed not overjoyed at the treat in store, but submitted.

"A musician and an artist," said Nan to Miss Pres-

ton, as they went up-stairs; "she must be an Admirable Crichton."

"Oh, studio is a comprehensive term with Mrs. Fitzhugh," said Miss Preston, dryly. "I believe it is cats at present, is it not, Luella?"

Cats it was. There were paintings—execrable ones—on the walls and on easels. There were also some bits of wood-carving and some models in clay, not bad. But Mrs. Fitzhugh's latest triumph was as a taxidermist. Cats of all colors, ages, and sizes adorned the studio; but, as the Admirable Crichton pointed out, the chief variety was in the position. There were cats *couchant*, cats *statant*, cats *séjant*, cats *rampant*, cats in every position known to heraldry, and cats in many positions more suggestive of Punch and Judy than of that noble science. There was no speculation in their yellow eyes, but a good deal in their mouths, which had been skilfully managed. Mrs. Fitzhugh showed with pride an especially characteristic specimen of the genus Cheshire.

"But what an astonishing fatality there must have been!" exclaimed Lawrence, after paying the expected compliments.

The hostess had the grace to look confused. She had boasted of skinning, curing, and stuffing; but a dark certainty took possession of her visitors that she had also performed the preliminary process. "By Jove!" said Lawrence to himself, "I believe she would stuff any of us to keep her hand in."

CHAPTER XVI.

The morning after the party at Belleville showed Nan what Virginia could do in the way of rain. She had been luxuriating in a sky of Italian blueness and cloudlessness—a sky that you need not be constantly watching for probabilities. And now there was worse than a Scotch mist, more than a Scotch deluge, and all unredeemed by the wonderful dissolving views that used to play upon the Strathlowrie hills even in the worst of weather. The beautiful tea-roses were pelted heavily downward, their delicate petals soaked into the black mud. Everything looked drear and unlovely.

"Well," said Miss Preston, as the ladies sat in the library which a wood fire brightened, "for once I don't mind the rain. I shall be very glad to have one quiet day."

"Yes," Mrs. O'Neil agreed, "it is delightful to think we can 'keep ourselves *to* ourselves,' as Mrs. General Jones says. I am sick of seeing people."

"I could never tire of that," said Nan, enthusiastically. "But oh! I wonder what Tory is doing? Perhaps she will go up to the attic and look over—"

"You little goose!" laughed Miss Preston; "I really believe you think it rains in Scotland whenever it rains in Willoughby. I should be sorry if it rained in Willoughby whenever it rains in Scotland."

"God forbid!" said Mrs. O'Neil, with a shiver. And opening the piano she began one of the *Lieder* softly, so as to hear and join in the conversation when she chose.

Miss Preston sat watching Nan's crochet hook, and some pretty trifle rapidly growing in her hands. "I don't wonder that gentlemen are captivated by seeing ladies work."

"But are they?" asked Nan. "I always thought there were two things they specially detested—lap-dogs and fancy-work."

"Lap-dogs, doubtless, but not fancy-work. They think it is only an unwomanly woman who can't do it;" and Miss Preston sighed. She had tried plain sewing and embroidery and crochet, all with fearful results. Phyllis said, "Miss Car'line's fingahs is all thumbs."

"Why don't you get a dog?" suggested Nan. "Not a lap-dog, but a great big one."

"And have my clothes ruined! That great creature at the convent left his paw-marks on my new gray walking-dress, besides nearly giving me hydrophobia. I hate dogs. Who that had the misfortune to be Luella's cousin-in-law would not?"

"I would not. I love dogs of every sort—big and little, pretty and ugly, kind and cross. What would I not give to see Kelpie!"

"Why not hate Luella?" Margaret asked Miss Preston. "That would be more just and—"

"Speak of angels," etc. Alas! there was one person in Willoughby whose movements were not dependent on the weather. The library door was opened and Bridget announced—

"The Mis' Colonel, mum!"

"The Mis' Colonel" delaying her entrance for a moment, Margaret wrathfully rang the bell.

"Now, Margaret," cried the deep voice, as its owner appeared, "don't ring to know why Bridget showed me in instead of Algy, for I will tell you. What is the use of being a relation if you are forever standing on ceremony? I just came in by the side porch, and then I ran out to the kitchen to give Bridget my umbrella. I think I will stay to dinner: something-or-other soup, tenderloin steak, roast chickens, and a roly-poly so like a corpse that Bridget might hold a wake over it—ha! ha! ha!"

Mrs. O'Neil was furious, the more so that Miss Preston laughed. She thought seriously of sending Mrs. Fitzhugh out of the house and never speaking to her again. And then to think of Bridget, to whose discretion she had generously left the choice of a pudding, basely consulting her own vulgar instincts and making a roly-poly! But before she had

time to pour out her vial Mrs. Fitzhugh turned to the others—

"I've just come from the dentist's. Dr. Wagner was surprised to see me on such an awful day; but I told him if it rained pitchforks I would never give up keeping an appointment till he gave up charging for it. I had him there. He's a perfect Yankee."

"I thought he was a German," said Miss Preston.

"A German like me, why don't you say, Carrie? for that's what you mean. So he is, in race; but in principle he's a Yankee like my Lord Lawrence."

When Mrs. Colonel Fitzhugh left home, she had expressed her intention of looking in at the O'Neils and stirring up the animals. This game of mental gymnastics she was now engaged in.

"Do you know everybody in Willoughby is talking about you, darling?" she now said to Nan.

"About me!" repeated Nan, astonished. "Was it for kissing Pluto John?"

"Oh, you innocent! you are letting out that Margaret has been giving you fits for what everybody thought just too sweet. No, it's your family history, bless you!"

Margaret grew pale with anger, Nan red with shame. Could it be, the latter wondered, that people in Virginia knew about the scraps of paper with the mystic letters at their head?

Mrs. Colonel saw an outburst coming and rushed on. "They say you were stolen in infancy, and that

nobody knows exactly who you are, but that it is suspected you are the only daughter and heiress of an English duke. Wouldn't I like to be in your shoes!"

Nan was much relieved. "I think they might have invented something better than the invariable plot of a dime novel," said Miss Preston, dryly.

"For *they* say *you*, Carrie!" cried Mrs. O'Neil, in wrath. "There is only one person in Willoughby *au courant* of the nobility of Europe. I am so glad it was not a German countess."

It was now Mrs. Colonel's turn to redden. She felt certain they had been discussing her questions to Lawrence, and, as a consequence, her ancestral tree. There is no knowing what might have been said or done next but for Dr. Preston's entrance, under cover of which Mrs. Colonel took herself off.

"But surely you are not walking on such a day," exclaimed Lawrence, as he assisted her in putting on an old water-proof cloak which Bridget would have scorned.

"Catch me having out a two-thousand-dollar carriage in such weather! It is a day to be on, not in, one's own conveyance;" and she displayed a pair of feet which she considered captivating. "The mud I got out of a hole in your sidewalk. Oh, by-the-way, here's a religious conundrum for the parson: *Why is his sidewalk like the other world?* You give it up? *Because it's got a bad place in it.* Ha! ha! Mr. O'Neil can give that at the next prayer-

meeting. I always make my own conundrums, and then I—"

"Always know the answer," said Lawrence, and he bowed the firebrand off.

It is needless to say that Margaret's first proceeding was peremptorily to forbid the appearance of the objectionable roly-poly—an order heard by Nan with dismay, and by Algernon Charles with ill-concealed rapture. It was only after Dr. Preston interposed, judiciously blending the intercession with great indignation against the obnoxious Mrs. Colonel, that the edict was revoked. After all, it was the pudding's appearance that put them all in good-humor again, for even Margaret could not resist the long, smooth proportions, but laughed hysterically, and so far forgot her prejudices as to be helped twice.

And Nan laughed as heartily as any one, perhaps; but in her heart she was thinking what a treat—reserved for high days and holidays—a roly-poly had been at the Manse; and wishing, "Oh, if I could only share everything with papa and Tory!"

Miss Preston did not care for a siesta on a cool day, so she bore Nan off to her room after dinner. "I never can talk to you before Lady Cockleorum," she said. "I really believe that creature has no soul."

Nan had a slight headache and a slight heartache. She was just a little homesick for Tory and all their simple pleasures, and for the minister, who had hith-

erto stood between her and the world. This same world was not all so bright as Nan had fancied. It had its dark days, and its disagreeable people, and its gossip; and she hated disagreeable things.

But Miss Preston put her on her sofa and took a low seat beside her, and put the golden curls down beside Nan's dark, straight locks. And partly from curiosity, but more from interest, she soon drew out of Nan the whole story of her life—the attic and the half-crown incidents excepted. Nan was determined never to tell the story of her father's shortcomings —or her own.

How angry Mrs. O'Neil would have been had she known! and how surprised to hear the proud Virginian's commentary!—"Why, dear little Nan, it is a perfect idyl, a thousand times better than our prosaic life here." And then she exhorted Nan to cheer up, and asked her if she would not take her as her sister, Tory being so far off. And then and there they swore eternal friendship.

And Nan went on to speak of her mother—her own mother she called her now—being on the same continent with the grave she longed to see. And she confided to her friend that she thought she would have been afraid of her father, had he lived, but that she was sure she would have adored her mother. Her uncle had given her the "Vida Devota" when she left; and now declaring her headache all gone, she ran to her room for it, to show it to Miss Preston.

The latter admired it as much as Nan desired, and knowing something of the intrinsic value of the old plates and the rich binding and clasps, she, too, began to weave a romance about Mercedes Guzman.

"Are you like your mother?" she asked Nan.

"Oh no!" cried Nan, eagerly, resenting the question on her mother's account. "Papa—I mean my uncle—once told me I was like my father, though he was tall and pale, and very much better looking. No one ever described my mother to me: indeed, no one at the Manse had ever seen her; but I fancy her young and radiant, like that Madonna of Murillo's in the library."

When next Miss Preston happened to be alone with Mrs. O'Neil she said, "You don't know how I wish that child had a mother. If ever she should turn Catholic, it will be simply from that longing for mother-love which their *culte* of the Blessed Virgin satisfies."

"It is just possible," said Margaret, with a peculiar smile, "that we may be able to satisfy her longing in another way."

"What do you mean, Margaret? You are as mysterious as Luella."

"Carrie," asked Margaret, "if I tell you something connected with Nan, will you promise faithfully never to breathe it till I give you permission?"

"Why not?—yes."

"Not even to Lawrence?"

"Not even to Lawrence."

The door was open. Margaret rose and closed it, and then glanced round the room. Was she thinking of her confidences to Sophy Campbell, and Davie listening under the sofa?

Then she came close to Miss Preston and said, "Nan's mother is no more dead than I am!"

CHAPTER XVII.

During the last fortnight of Mrs. Hotspur's stay in Willoughby Nan led a dual life. Almost every evening there was a party somewhere; and she never missed one, and never failed to enjoy one. But at the same time she had utterly set aside Mrs. Hotspur's warning, and yielded herself without reserve to the fascination of Mother Francoise.

She had seen her many times since their first meeting—once or twice with Miss Preston, oftener with Mrs. General Jones, oftener still alone. The Superior never introduced religious discussions, or referred to any differences between them, and seemed to shrink from Mrs. General Jones's allusions to them. While Mrs. Jones was speaking, she listened to her politely; as soon as she ceased, the subject was changed. If anything or anybody about the convent offended Nan's tastes or wounded her susceptibilities, it would never be Mother Françoise.

And yet her tastes, and perhaps something deeper, were offended. A closer acquaintance with the Superior had only deepened her admiration for her, but a closer acquaintance with the convent had sur-

prised and disappointed her. She had expected bare floors and wooden chairs, and all the outward and visible signs of holy poverty, but she had not expected the cheap-looking, almost tawdry, decorations of the altar and the gaudy coloring of the pictures, and she was horrified at finding the statue of the Blessed Virgin in the Community-room dressed in spangled muslin. She could imagine Sister Anastasia or Mrs. General Jones approving such things, but she could not imagine Mother Françoise permitting them. Poverty seemed to her no excuse. Were she Superior, she said to herself, she would soon change it all. She would sweep away most of the trash—that was what she called it—and have only one or two really good things. The spangled dress she considered as bad in its way as Mr. Tolivar's slippers.

Mrs. Hotspur had recommended Nan to make her decisions matters of principle, not of persons. There was danger now of her making them mere matters of taste.

Of course she was unjust. The old established foundation from which the nuns of Willoughby came had everything that could satisfy the most fastidious; and if the exiles did not grumble at the change, it was not that they did not feel it. But in their view it was absolutely necessary to express certain ideas and events objectively; and as they had no money to do what the Mother-house had done, it

was not wonderful that the result should be different.

Then Nan thought of something she could do for them, and in doing it deeply offended Margaret.

The Prestons had a portfolio of beautiful engravings which they had brought from abroad, and among them were two of sacred art's greatest treasures, the Sistine Madonna—not the entire picture, but the Mother and the Holy Child; and Nan screwed up her courage and asked Miss Preston to give one to the nuns. Miss Preston was generous where she loved, and she told Nan she would give it to her in a minute, but that it would be in her opinion wrong to encourage, even by the gift of a picture, what she considered gross superstition.

Nan was terribly disappointed, but thought no more of the matter. But a day or two after she saw in the window of a cabinet-maker a precisely similar engraving, beautifully framed. She ran in to ask the price, but was told it was not for sale.

"But how much would it be if it were?" asked Nan.

The man was not sure, but certainly not less than thirty or forty dollars.

Thirty or forty dollars! As far as Nan was concerned, it might as well have been thirty or forty crown diamonds. Her little stock of pocket-money had almost vanished already, and Margaret had said nothing about giving her more. Then she felt

ashamed of having asked for the picture. She had had no idea of its value.

As she was leaving the shop she almost ran against a lady—Miss Preston. "Oh," said the latter, "I was just looking for you. How do you like your picture now?"

"Oh!" cried Nan, "is it your picture? I thought it was another."

"I said yours, not mine."

"Oh, Carrie, I could not possibly take it! I did not know it was yours, and I asked the man the price, and—"

"And so the nuns are to go without it, after all?"

"Oh, Carrie!" exclaimed Nan again, her face all aglow, "is it really for them, after all?"

"It is for you to do exactly what you like with. But remember, I have not changed my mind. I happened to mention it to Lawrence, and he said that one of the copies was his, and that you should have it."

"How kind of him!" cried Nan. "How can I ever thank you both enough for it?"

"Never mind the thanks. And now take my advice: go home and write your note, if a note you must write. Let the man send the picture directly from the shop, and don't say a word to Margaret till it is safe in the convent."

Nan understood. When the picture was safely off, she told Margaret, for she knew Mrs. General

Jones would spread the tidings of the gift, and so she would be sure to hear of it sooner or later. And then Nan had to hear some very disagreeable remarks on the subject of ingratitude which rather spoiled the pleasure of the gift. Mrs. O'Neil had cast covetous eyes on the portfolio for many a day.

But by way of compensation Nan had a note from the Superior. "My children and I," wrote Mother Françoise, "cannot thank you in words; but the loveliest flowers in our garden shall always be offered in your name before your gift to plead for you to Our Blessed Mother and her Divine Son."

When next Nan visited the convent it seemed quite a little *fête*. The nuns gathered about her affectionately, dropping even the thin veil of ceremony there had been between them, yet showing much tact and delicacy, and not seeming to take anything for granted. Before she left, Mother Françoise asked her if she would not come again the next afternoon. A Passionist Father, then holding a mission in the town, was to give them a sermon and Benediction, and the nuns would so much like Nan to be present. "But not if you have any objection," added Mother Françoise. "It would be to us a pleasure too dearly purchased if it gave you a moment's uneasiness." Of course Nan promised to come.

And that night and next day Nan really reflected as well as dreamed. There were times when, young

as she was, she felt an ardent desire to have her life settled. She had said so once to Miss Preston in Margaret's presence.

"Good gracious, Nan!" said Miss Preston, "one would think you were five hundred years old. How do you intend to settle your life? Do you mean you wish to get married?"

"Oh no," replied Nan, with the utmost seriousness. "There is no one to marry."

Both ladies laughed, and Margaret pronounced it "too rich." "It's a case of Awbraham," she profanely said, falling back upon Rorie again. "'Behold here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?' We have 'Japhet in search of a Father,' and 'Cœlebs in search of a Wife,' and now we shall have 'Nan in search of a Husband.'"

Nan got angry. "You know it's no such thing, Margaret. I have made up my mind never to marry."

"Oh," said Margaret, coolly, "an old maid like Miss Macalaster; no—Miss Grizzell, for there will be no Gabriel." And she sang in Miss Grizzell's own quavers a verse from the Castle Lowrie *repertoire.*

Nan had determined to say no more about having her life settled, but it pleased her to think there was another way of doing it besides getting married or being an old maid like Miss Grizzell. What if she should take this way and put an end to uncertainties?

And then she wondered if the Superior had any idea of the thoughts that were passing in her mind? if she ever thought of her at all, except when she was present? What if Nan should detain her in the chapel at the close of Benediction, and throw herself at her feet, and cry, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God?" She almost thought she would.

But when the time came she did nothing of the kind. One of the sudden changes of feeling with which she was so familiar had come over her, and she felt no longer agitated or in haste. In the tumult of her own thoughts she had at first scarcely listened to the priest, but gradually the voice had made itself heard above the tumult, and some of the words had sunk into her soul. "There is something higher than earthly happiness, something better than earthly love. O Soul, made for God, and finding rest in Him alone! when hereafter thou findest Him thou shalt think so little of earthly happiness and earthly love that it shall not even come into thy mind to remember whether these have been thine or no."

When the last notes of the *Laudate Dominum* died away Nan still knelt; but it was not to utter a vow, but a prayer. "O send out Thy light and Thy truth, that they may lead me and bring me unto Thy holy hill and to Thy dwelling!"

She prayed with all her soul. Yet even as she

rose she thought to herself, despairingly, "But how shall I know when my petition is heard? It is a prayer that all earnest souls offer; yet some, rising from their knees, go to Rome, and some to Geneva, and some to divers places between."

CHAPTER XVIII.

If freedom from care and gratification of one's desires can constitute happiness, Nan's first two years in America were the happiest of her life. How much of her ease, in more than one respect, she owed to the Prestons she had not the least idea. As for Margaret, as she thought she saw certain designs of her own in a fair way to be accomplished, she grew more gracious to Nan and more confidential; and "the daughters of the land" fared but badly. Miss Preston was indifferent to Margaret's caricature, except when it was exercised on her own relatives; but as half Willoughby was connected with her in some way, that was a rather extensive reservation. With Nan there need be no delicacy, and so she was placed in the false position of laughing with Margaret at Ninon's juvenilities, and with Miss Preston at Lady Cockleorum's airs and temper.

Margaret had not been slow to discover that her weapon of ridicule was a most efficacious one with Nan herself. It was really this that had settled the convent business for the time being. The reader will have perceived that the attraction of convent-

ual life had nothing to do with religious principle. Conscience was not asked to interfere *pro* or *con;* and, so far, the Passionist Father had struck the only serious chord. Nan had wished to identify herself with the Middle Ages, and those agreeable things she classed with that period, and she was sure the world would be well lost for love of—Mother Françoise. Margaret understood perfectly how the case stood, and was quite unconcerned even when all Willoughby was talking over the expected "perversion." Mr. O'Neil had heard of it first from one of his elders, and coming home much shocked, had sent for Nan and talked to her about antichrist and the Woman of Babylon, and prayed with her. Miss Preston had taken her to see Mr. Tolivar, and the latter had made his appearance in what Margaret called the "floppers;" and after firing off a heavy broadside, without permitting the enemy to return the fire, had slowly closed one of his fishy little eyes and smacked his lips, as who should say, "Let the Pope answer *that* if he can!"

Mrs. O'Neil laughed heartily when she heard of it, and said it was like taking the upper and nether millstones to crush a gnat when you might blow it away with a breath. And forthwith she proceeded to show how it could be done.

"What a capital view of the convent you have from Judge Harry's veranda!" she remarked incidentally that evening. "I was quite interested in

watching the nuns pacing up and down. Poor wretches! if that is their recreation, I wonder what their work is."

"But," said Nan, "I looked through the fence once and saw them playing with a dog."

"And I suppose for a nun to play with a dog is as if Hugh should play poker. Well, Nan, let me give you one piece of advice: don't join them till you have tried on the habit."

"My dear," said Mr. O'Neil, gravely, "it is not a subject for jest—"

"It is not indeed," interrupted Margaret. "It may do very well for pretty people, and I dare say Nan is fancying herself another Mother Françoise. Let her try it on and look in the glass!—that's all I have to say."

It was enough. In the secrecy of her chamber at bedtime did Nan arrange what Whistler would call a *nocturne in black and white.* And she was forced to admit that, difference of age being allowed for, the glass reflected some one far more like Sister Anastasia than Mother Françoise. The convent project was indefinitely postponed.

And then Nan began to write, and decided she would be famous instead of holy. It would be more correct to say that she began to publish, for she had written verses for years. Rhymers have no difficulty in getting themselves put in print, provided they are not particular as to *what* print, and are not writing

from mercenary motives. Nan scorned the idea of coining her grand thoughts into money, of turning her Pegasus into a plough-horse; and people who heard her so express herself naturally supposed her private revenue something handsome. She had quite forgotten her scheme of taking Tory to Spain. As a poetess, Nan cultivated an abstracted, melancholy air; and when Mrs. Benjamin said to her one day, "I think your face, when in repose, is so sad," she felt a thrill of pleasure, and reminded her sympathizer that those who had her fatal gift "learn in suffering what they teach in song."

Had Nan never improvised a habit and looked in the glass, she might have been a nun; had she persevered in her attentions to the muse, she might have been heard of as a poetess. Not much good, however, comes of philosophizing over what might have been. With a thousand other gifts, Nan had not the invaluable one of perseverance; so that when some one happened to express surprise at her not taking to novel-writing, she at once determined to be a Charlotte Bronté. She wrote a story, sent it to a magazine, and had it accepted on the same liberal terms as the poetry. Does the unsophisticated reader wonder at such terms? But there are "authors' agents" in London whose business it is to get articles inserted in magazines, and they charge a stated sum for presenting an article, and a guinea for the luxury of letting you read your production in

print, when you could read it in manuscript forever for nothing.

Nan's first story was very like a girl's first story. Margaret said it was very like a whale. It had this variety: that whereas love-stories in general end with matrimony, Nan permitted a year or so of married life, and then killed off baby, wife, and maniac husband. It was not so like Charlotte Bronté as she had intended, but it was full of pretty descriptions.

After all, Nan wondered if her real genius was not as an essayist. She thought she might do for the South what Washington Irving had done for the North, or she might be another *Elia*, or perhaps her style was just a little graver—more like Addison's; she was quite sure she could do the pure and beautiful English. Her essay, when written, went to a Southern publication, and the editor wrote and courteously asked for the photograph of his gifted contributor. But Nan's look in the glass had done her good service. She reminded the editor of what Mirabeau said to the admirer who wrote for a description of him: "Fancy his Satanic Majesty after he has had the small-pox." And she begged leave to paraphrase it: "Fancy his Satanic Majesty's wife without the small-pox, but with a cold in her head."

And then Margaret sent Nan sailing off on another tack.

Ever since the meeting at Aunt Chloe's cabin Dr. Preston and Nan had been the best of friends.

Among those who envied for themselves or for their daughters the golden opportunities possessed by one actually living in the house with such a prize, it was confidently asserted that Mrs. O'Neil had brought her cousin out for the express purpose of being Mrs. Preston. While Nan had only her appearance to go upon, her chance was considered below par. She might be clever, people said, but men liked beauty, not brains; in fact, rather preferred a fool. But when Nan's cleverness bore fruit in "poems" and "pieces," her prospects, rather inconsistently, were regarded as at a premium. "Things seen are mightier than things heard;" and literary performances have their effect on dwellers in an out-of-the-way town.

As to the truth of the charge against Mrs. O'Neil, a glance at the letter she had just finished to Sophy Campbell may help us to decide. Margaret's letters to Sophy were by no means so frequent, so long, or so confidential as in the days of her engagement she had vowed they should be. She pronounced her quondam bosom friend a good little thing, but old-fashioned and *gauche*. About Nan, however, she wrote to her freely, much more freely than to the Manse; for Sophie was pledged to secrecy, and one of her old-fashioned ways was a habit of keeping her word.

"It is too rich," wrote Margaret, "to see Dr. Preston and Nan. You know what my plans were in sending for her; and Lawrence has fallen in with

them as meekly as possible. Of course I don't believe he would look at her except for his disappointment—you remember I told you about his *fiancée*, a fiery South Carolinian, throwing him over on account of his Yankee politics, which he, the goose! thought it 'only honorable' to tell her. Well, the haughty fair married out of pique the first fire-eater that asked her—a rebel general, whom she prized all the more that his patriotism had left him without the full complement of arms, or legs, or something. The last I heard of them they were in Baltimore, he reposing on his laurels, and she giving singing lessons (she has a magnificent voice) to pay the taxes on their estate and to provide her hero with the brandy which he loves even better than he does her. And now Lawrence's heart is being caught in the rebound; or perhaps it is only that, his own happiness being out of the question, he is philanthropic enough to plan the rescue of Nan from my guardianship. I don't think Ninon sees it at all, and you may depend upon it I shall not enlighten her. As for the little fool herself, unless some one gives her a hint she will know nothing about it till he lays Preston Place and his stock of Yankee notions at her feet, and then she will be so frightened she will say, 'No, thank you, sir,' and begin to howl. Of course I shall give her the hint."

Another extract from the same letter I may give, though it has nothing to do with Nan.

"Hugh groans in spirit at the worldliness of everybody and everything here, and considers all vanity and vexation, the "human hymns" in particular. I must tell you a ridiculous adventure he had lately—it is really too good to keep. He had to go by the stage to the Synod at Wayleigh, thirty miles from here, and began the journey with two perfect specimens of the ancient Briton, feminine gender, who have come to visit a brother in this part of the world. Imagine Hugh doing the agreeable, and the ancients unbending and summing him up mentally as 'A most *excellent* young man!' when enter from a way-side inn a veritable Dick Swiveller—only far more disreputable than the original—who slaps Hugh's shoulder familiarly and addresses him as Bob. The ancient Britons at first share Hugh's indignation, but as Mr. Swiveller taxes him with being ashamed of him and pretending not to know him, and recounts one rollicking adventure after another in which they have been boon companions, they are first uncertain, then too certain that the worst is true; and shrinking into the farthest corner of the stage, they draw their shapeless tweed garments closely about them, and sniff the air with their Roman noses. Poor Hugh!"

Margaret began to pave the way for the hint, but so carefully that Nan at first did not understand it. Mrs. O'Neil had always been more frank than kind in her criticisms on her cousin's appearance, and Nan

had from time to time shed a good many tears, and at last had grown nervously sensitive whenever the subject of beauty or ugliness was mentioned. Once she asked Miss Preston if she was really so hideous as Margaret said. "You are not hideous at all," said Miss Preston. "You are certainly not a beauty, but you have a nice bright face, full of intelligence. It is a thousand times nicer than Margaret's."

Nan was cheered. "Even with the Cockleorum neck attached?" she asked.

"I could wring the Cockleorum neck!" cried her friend, wrathfully.

But during Nan's second year in Willoughby Margaret would occasionally compliment her. "Why, child, you have just narrowly escaped looking pretty this evening." "When you wish to captivate, always wear a thin white muslin," etc. Such remarks from Margaret were more to Nan than a thousand more gushing compliments from others. She had an uneasy consciousness that if anything bad could be said of her, Margaret would say it, so that even her most carelessly said good things were comforting; and the painful belief in her special ugliness, with its attendant self-consciousness, once removed, Nan's personal appearance improved daily. Happiness is a great beautifier.

Then, as Nan's nineteenth birthday approached, Margaret's hints grew more specific. Nan was saying how old she felt. "You may say how old you

are," said Margaret. "For remember America is not like Strathlowrie, where an Evangeline of eighty still expects the return of her Gabriel, and where a woman is in her prime at forty. In Willoughby you are *passée* at twenty-three, a hopeless old maid at twenty-five, and at thirty old enough to kill!

"However," Margaret resumed after a moment, "I don't think we are to have an old maid in the family, and I think you may consider yourself a precious lucky girl."

Nan was not quite so innocent as Margaret supposed. Her young friends were always coupling her with Dr. Preston, and even Mother Françoise had heard something, and had told Nan she must bring her friend up to see her. The nuns always knew everything that was going on in Willoughby.

But when Margaret mentioned the subject it assumed an air of reality such as before Nan had not dared or cared to invest it with. Perhaps Dr. Preston had already spoken to Mrs. O'Neil. That was not the American way of doing things; but everybody said Lawrence was more like an Englishman than an American, and then he might think that Scotch people would expect Scotch formalities. Perhaps he had even written to her uncle. What would Tory say?

Nan, as we have seen, was in the habit of settling the most important questions of her life in five or ten minutes. Thus she had settled the coming to

America, and the being or not being a nun, to say nothing of the various literary schemes. The mere fact of anything connected with her being unsettled was unbearable. Unfortunately, the settlements did not last. What appeared to her the most desirable of schemes to-day would probably seem quite the reverse to-morrow. But then the state of uncertainty reintroduced by this change of feeling would be nipped in the bud by another decision. So, had Nan only known it, many a life is thrown away, having nothing to show at the end but a multitude of decisions, any one of which, had it only been adhered to, might have been the life's salvation.

With her usual promptness, Nan proceeded to settle one point more—to answer, in short, the question which Dr. Preston had not yet asked; and the considerations that occurred to her were these:

Dr. Preston was the most eligible *parti* she had ever seen, and Margaret had truly said there was no one in Willoughby who would not jump at him—politics and all.

Dr. Preston was, after the strictest sect, an F.F.V., and she thought an F.F.V. far better than Mrs. Colonel Fitzhugh's counts, and quite as good as her English dukes.

The glories of Preston Place would be rehearsed in Strathlowrie by all sorts and conditions—from Miss Macalaster at her lute to Kirsty Polson's mother at her mangle.

She, Nan, would send for Tory and marry her off. No, she would bring her, not send for her—for of course they would go to Strathlowrie on the wedding tour. What loads of things she would take to her uncle! Of course she would have a maid with her—some one like Phyllis—no, a jet black one; and then people would see for themselves that the half had not been told.

If Dr. Preston should die, a widow was a much more interesting creature than an old maid. Then, if she should be very rich she would probably build a chapel or endow a convent; and then, perhaps, she would even begin a new Order, and be Lady Abbess. The recollection of the *nocturne* was fading.

And so Nan made one decision more, and made it without reference to such a bagatelle as Dr. Preston's feeling for her, or hers for Dr. Preston.

Does the reader pronounce her a selfish little wretch? But she was not. She was simply an ignorant one, who had not yet discovered what love is. As for embracing widowhood in her speculations, she would have embraced the *suttee* with equal large-mindedness, had the *suttee* been fashionable in Virginia. In reality, had Lawrence Preston died on the very day of her theories, she would have half broken her heart for her friend, though she did not care for him as a lover. Nan's theories and practice were far apart.

And, after all, she may never have a chance of carrying out her decision, even should she keep to it, which is more than unlikely. She had not once thought of the excellent advice, "First catch your hare."

CHAPTER XIX.

NAN'S birthday fell on that most beautiful and dear feast when we commemorate the faithful departed. And her nineteenth birthday was perhaps the loveliest and happiest day of her life.

To begin with, Nature did her best. The land lay half shrouded, half glorified by the golden mist of Indian summer—that enchanting season which Acadians call the Summer of all Saints. The air was balmy as that of a day in June, but there was no June oppression or glare. The lawn was still soft and velvety. Foliage was as luxuriant as ever, only the green had been touched by some wizard hand into every shade of yellow, orange, and crimson. And over everything was that indescribable hush which precedes the destroyer. It was the summer with a graver grace; the summer's music written in a minor key. And this touch of sadness in outer nature found something in Nan corresponding to it. Nothing to her was perfect unless there was in it a touch of the pathetic, which is almost the same as saying, unless there was in it a touch of the imperfect. This birthday she thought a day of days.

Everybody was kind—even Margaret kissed her with something like affection—and she had beautiful presents, which she liked all the better because they took for granted her literary tastes. I am not quite sure that she would have liked the imperfect touch in the gifts, only that it had also that touch of the ludicrous which the giver never failed to supply. Mrs. Benjamin had sent a copy of Martin Tupper!

Miss Preston thought Nan should go to St. Mark's with her, but Nan begged off. She did not wish to spoil the day by the sight of Mr. Tolivar, whom she disliked more than ever since he had winked at her and smacked his lips. Miss Preston herself had been disgusted, though she quite agreed with Mr. Tolivar's views.

Nan dreamed the morning away on the piazza, and after early dinner she eluded everybody and went off to Mother Françoise. The Superior knew just as well as though she had been Nan's confessor the changes her mind had undergone; but if she felt any disappointment she never betrayed it. Nan was now playing the rôle of a frivolous person who had allowed the world, the flesh, and the devil to get the better of her, but who was not yet beyond hope. Nay, did not the far-off look they were always telling her about indicate as much? The far-off look was Nan's strong point; it had already done duty as the foreshadowing of the cloister, the abstraction of genius, the infinite sadness of the fatally

gifted; and now it was the yearning of the soul that, having once had divine aspirations, is vainly trying to satisfy itself with meaner things.

So Nan went to Mother Françoise and knelt with her in the little chapel, and walked with her in the garden. She loved Mother Françoise more than a thousand Dr. Prestons; but then how could she go against her destiny—as she had at present determined it?

As the convent door closed upon her she beheld Dr. Preston in his phaeton at the door. "I thought you were never coming," said he, as he sprang to the ground.

"You did not ring, did you?" asked Nan, in dismay.

"Twice," said the doctor, cheerily; "once to ask if you were there, and again to ask if they were sure you had not gone. I was just going to make a third attack when I saw you coming."

Nan wondered if Mother Françoise would hear of it.

"But where are you going?" she asked, when they passed Preston Place and neared the wharf where Sam, the doctor's man, stood grinning.

"I told Mrs. O'Neil I was going to take you for a drive, but I believe I meant a row—unless you prefer driving."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Nan, delighted, "it will be delicious on the river; but I wish I had brought my parasol."

"You will not need it;" and Lawrence pointed to a tiny boat with a gay awning over the stern.

Nan was in raptures. "But why did you not tell the others? They might have come too."

"They would have come, and then we should all have been drowned. This boat only holds two."

"But they will be so disappointed."

"They will never know. I will swear you to secrecy before I land you."

They let the boat glide with the stream—the high, dark cliffs of the Virginia side almost overhanging them; the low, green shores of Ohio, fringed with dwarf willows, looking far off in the hazy atmosphere. There is in the beautiful river an island, not unknown to story, where an exile from a far land once found a refuge, and amid the seclusion of what was then an almost unbroken wilderness created a paradise where with those he loved he lived in perfect happiness, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." And there the Serpent, in the form of a brilliant but unscrupulous politician, entered, and rousing for his own selfish purposes the demon of ambition in the exile's bosom, gained him to his guilty schemes and involved him in his ruin. On that island landed Dr. Preston and Nan, and were glad to find it free from the picnic parties that much affect it. Scarcely a stone of the old mansion stands. You can but say to yourself, "Here was the front door; here was the library where they sat and plotted; here is where

the arms were stored." But the old well remains, and beside it, after their explorations, Nan and Lawrence sat down.

"This," said the doctor, "is where tradition says they used to sit in the long summer afternoons. From here you get all the good points of the landscape, and at the same time command the approach to the landing.

Nan rose and looked into the well. "What if old wells and mirrors could show all the faces that have looked into them! I used to be afraid of some of the glasses at Castle Lowrie, when Tory and I played in the unoccupied rooms. And they have one at the Benjamins' I have the same feeling about. Mr. Benjamin's mother was a Ten Eyck — and they brought it over from Holland in the Dutch days of New York, and it was old then. I am really afraid to look into it."

"I should think you would be," laughed Lawrence, "if the Benjamin *mater* is anywhere about. The mirror is her Sacred Cow, or White Elephant. Margaret says she has a separate story for every spot on its surface, and a three-volume novel for the crack in the upper left-hand corner."

"How lovely everything is!" exclaimed Nan, after a pause, "and yet so utterly unlike my dear Scotland."

"And I suppose nothing can be perfect that is not exactly like your dear Scotland," said Lawrence, looking at her kindly.

"I don't know. It would be almost impossible to find fault with to-day. But generally everything is too bright. I thought at first I liked the cloudless blue sky, but I begin to long for the great masses of snow and silver which are sure to be somewhere in our brightest sky, and even for the storm-clouds. Our mountains are never two minutes the same."

"Ah! you like change, then. You are a true woman."

"I like change in nature. Many, many an hour I have spent lying in the long grass of the outer garden, and making fairy-tales out of the changing clouds. I wonder if this cloudless sky is not the reason that Americans are so matter-of-fact?"

"But are we?"

"Oh, not you so much as just the American nation in general, and Yankees in particular."

"But I thought," said Lawrence, laughing, "my unpardonable sin was in being a Yankee."

"You know very well what I mean—Yankees by birth. A mathematical nation is a matter-of-fact nation, and I am sure even in Willoughby quite little girls do algebra before they know a word of history."

"And are the Scotch not mathematical?"

"No, they are metaphysical. You should hear Kirsty Polson's father, who is only a poor old cobbler, discussing metaphysical points. My uncle used to say John could confute all the skeptical arguments about Personal Identity and Necessity as well

as Bishop Butler himself, and yet he certainly had never heard of the 'Analogy.' "

"But it seems to me John is not the only *lusus naturæ*. Do you mean to say you have read the 'Analogy?' "

"I have learned it," said Nan. "I liked it so much that my uncle went over it with me, and then he let me help a student whom he was getting through college—just a poor lad, who used to go for our milk."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Lawrence, "I am quite bewildered and alarmed. I did not know young ladies learned such things."

"They don't generally in Scotland, but they do here. So, you see, you know very little about your own land. I was at an examination at Miss Carrington's last June, and the graduates had Butler. They say they have it in almost all the schools."

"Well, you see, I have been so long abroad I have forgotten how learned we are at home. May I ask if Miss Carrington's pupils did her credit?"

"Yes, in other things. They did not do Butler credit, for they gave him in the words of the book."

"And do you think girls could give any other words to such a subject?"

"Certainly; but you are laughing at them or at me. Mrs. Benjamin does not approve of the study; she says it will put infidel notions into the girls' heads."

"Whereas you feel armed by it against infidel notions."

"I feel nothing of the sort. I never needed such arms. I don't undervalue the arguments, but I believe without them. I like Butler purely as metaphysics."

"Well, my German friends would think their sisters better occupied in knitting their stockings."

"Or 'cutting bread-and-butter,' like Werter's Charlotte. I hate Germans; they are so fond of eating—and drinking—"

"And metaphysics."

"Ye—es. Well, I hate Germans, at any rate, and I never would learn their language."

"Then you don't know what you miss, for English translations are often worse than the 'Analogy' of the Carringtonites. I dare say you judge of German from the guttural of old Schwartz at the ice-cream saloon."

"Do you suppose I go so often to the ice-cream saloon?"

"To my certain knowledge you were there thrice in one evening lately with three separate cavaliers."

Nan blushed. "Well, you were the third; and it was very shabby of you to ask me, if you knew I had been twice before, and were going to cast it up. I only went because I did not like to hurt your feelings by refusing."

"That was kind! And will you always be as considerate when I ask a favor?"

Nan blushed again. "Certainly, when it is a question of ice-cream."

"But suppose it should be a question of something else?"

"*Celà dépend.*" Nan rose and looked again into the well.

Lawrence rose also and stood beside her.

"Behold truth at the bottom of a well!" said Nan, pointing to her own face reflected there.

Lawrence looked down into the still water, which forthwith mirrored two faces side by side.

"You said a few minutes ago, 'What if old wells had the power of showing you all the faces that have looked into them!' If this one had, it would show you Lawrence Preston in at least one other dissolving view, with another face than yours beside mine. Dear Nan, may I tell you the story of that other face?"

"Yes," said Nan.

CHAPTER XX.

"But wait," said Lawrence, opening a basket which he had taken from the locker of the boat, and displaying great bunches of luscious grapes of half a dozen varieties. "Listening is dull work, and if I see you amusing yourself with these, I shall have less scruple in spinning a long yarn."

So Nan sat on the bench and ate grapes, and Lawrence stood leaning against the moss-grown well.

"Did the fairy-tales you found in the clouds," said Lawrence, looking down into Nan's eager face, "begin with 'Once upon a time?' The story I find in the well begins that way, and the time seems long, long ago. In reality it is not quite ten years. But you know what the last ten years have been to the South — or rather you cannot know; even people born and brought up in Willoughby do not know. Border towns like this had few slaves, and were constantly receiving importations from the North; so that, much as Mrs. Benjamin and others would scorn the idea of such a thing, Willoughby was, even before the war, as much Northern as Southern. It was,

indeed, a sort of hybrid that both sides disowned. Old eastern families like our own and the Fitzhughs laughed at the pretensions of those whom they regarded as little better than their negroes, while immigrants from the North scouted the slowness of the place and the laziness and absurd notions of the people.

"Mrs. Benjamin, now, is a case in point. Her husband is well-born, though half Northern; and he is a plain, unassuming man, who but for his excellent temper must have separated from his wife long ago. I am sure I would have taken her life."

Cries of "Shame!" from the audience.

"Ah," said Lawrence, "you feel bound to take her part out of gratitude for the Tupper. Mrs. Benjamin has doubtless talked to you of her father's plantation and her father's slaves. The plantation was a wretched little farm in the most dreary and God-forsaken spot of this State, and the slaves were an old man and his wife, who between them did the entire work of the place. Mrs. Benjamin (she was then Arabella Collins) had always a taste for high life, and by pushing herself here, there, and everywhere, managed to get a footing in what Willoughby calls society—Heaven save the mark! She used to be known as Rouge-dragon, from the color of her best gown and her relentless pursuit of victims. Poor Benjamin became her unwilling prey."

Nan could not help laughing, but she was greatly

astonished. "You are surely mistaken," she said; "her little boy, Collins—"

"Is named after 'Old Man Collins,' who used to foretell the kind of weather from a dried goose-bone. That is Willoughby society. Well, I was going to say that if you wanted the faintest idea of what Virginia used to be, you would have to go farther south and farther east. General Fitzhugh showed me the other day his grandfather's will. That gives you an idea of the landed aristocracy of slave-times. He devises his plantation of six thousand acres, with slaves attached, his plantation of eighteen hundred acres and slaves, his plantation of twelve hundred acres and slaves, with other farms and outlying property. He mentions all the cattle, sheep, and hogs, his racing studs, his various coaches, each drawn by six horses, and so on through all the details of a vast domain.*

"But Virginia living was old-fashioned and frugal compared with that farther south. In South Carolina especially, common every-day life might pass as a series of pictures from the "Arabian Nights." Hospitality was literally without bounds. The crowds of guests constantly entertained were only outnumbered by the crowds of servants who waited upon them; the courtly company dined off gold and silver plate; everything was conducted on a scale of princely

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* *Princeton Review.*

magnificence that was almost barbaric in its profusion. The boys were educated in England, the girls were brought up at home like helpless princesses, with half a dozen servants for every want or whim. Men and women were alike elegant and accomplished; but the men drank and gambled, and settled their slightest quarrel by the sword.* This excess of luxury was mainly past before my day, but I can remember one such home."

Lawrence paused and looked out on the hazy river; then turning suddenly, he asked, "Did Margaret ever tell you of Irene?"

"Never," said Nan. The grapes were neglected, and she was listening with ears and eyes and heart.

"Then for that I thank her. It is of Irene the old well could tell you; and had it the gift you feared, it is Irene's face it would reflect."

Lawrence drew from his pocket a velvet case, opened it and handed it to Nan.

"Oh!" said Nan, softly, and said no more. What words would not be poor for such a face? But it flashed upon her with strange recognition, though she had never before heard the name of Irene. It was the king's daughter her imagination had painted, before death had stepped in to make her uncle's imagery plain. To Nan the coincidence was beautiful, not startling. She had more than once met people

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* *Princeton Review.*

whom she had dreamed about—waking or sleeping. She kissed the lovely face, then crimsoned, remembering that one who had so often done the same was looking on, and perhaps counting her kisses sacrilege. Dark and bright, proud and soft, fierce and tender—what charming contradictions looked out from the exquisite face! "It is perfect," said Nan at last.

"No," said Lawrence, half sighing, half smiling; "it is less than perfect, because it is not the face itself." Then, with a dreary laugh, "This is the well's story of ten years ago, you know; the echo of what I said then, not of what I say to-day. I have never told the story to human being before, and I must not grow sentimental over it.

"Well," he went on, "I saw Irene first in such a scene of enchantment as I have been describing to you. I do not wish to enhance my own triumph when I say she had the whole South at her feet; and why she should have passed by so many worthier of her, and chosen a foolish boy, God knows!

"Between my visits to Beauvoir and Irene's to Willoughby a year passed like a dream. My father had set his heart on my studying abroad, and insisted on my carrying out the plans that had been made before I met her. So to Germany I went, taking with me the comfort that though Senator Hamilton might possibly not lament if absence inclined his daughter's heart to a more distinguished suitor, Irene her-

self would die a thousand deaths rather than break her plighted word.

"The Hamiltons came to France while I was there, and Irene was the rage in Paris as she had been in Charleston. But courted and admired as she was, she never gave me one jealous pang. Few who have loved one so beautiful can say as much.

"In six weeks more we were to have been married, when the Hamiltons were called home by the death of the only son and brother. I went with them; I felt as though I could not let Irene out of my sight again, and the circumstances of Harry's death called for all the comfort friends could give. He had been stabbed in a gambling saloon in some drunken quarrel.

"Those were the stormy days before the war, when feeling ran almost higher than when words came at last to blows. The outbreak seemed to relieve the tension.

"The South Carolinians were, as you know, the extreme party in the South; Senator Hamilton was the extreme man of the South Carolinians. His health had failed since the death of his son, but nothing could keep him from his place in the Senate, where his bitter but eloquent invective was the sensation. I do not know whether the energy of his hate hastened his death or retarded it. Some said it took away the little strength he had; others declared it kept him up after all other strength was gone. At

any rate his death, when it did occur, was quite unexpected to her whom it most concerned—his daughter.

"I was at Beauvoir at the time, and Irene insisted on going to the coast to *meet her father*. It was useless to try to argue with her. 'I have always gone before,' she said, 'and do you think I would omit any token of love or respect because it is the last time?' 'Not know it!' she said, turning on her aunt, who had tried to dissuade her. 'Oh, what a mean and cowardly reason! I would know it, and it would break my heart!'

"I had to take them; and I shall never forget the strange, weird scene: the dark night brightened by the glare of hundreds of torches — for many and many a one besides Irene had come to honor her father; the ship at anchor; the lowered burden; the muffled dip of the oars; the silent crowd, standing back with true Southern delicacy to let the daughter receive her dead; the eyes shining like stars in the beautiful, pale, proud face that bent and kissed the coffin as she laid on it the wreath from Beauvoir. Then in an instant, as Irene stepped back, the coffin was hidden under palms and lilies and roses, and many a rare blossom, and we were borne along over a way literally strewn with flowers, while a military band wailed out its heart-breaking music.

"Time passed on, and the war broke out. All Irene's cousins and friends were fighting, and a shadow began to creep over her face—not for fear lest I, too,

should go, but for wonder that I had not gone already. If love makes heroes, it also makes cowards. How could I tell her that I had discarded the traditions we had both inherited; and that though I could not fight against my own kindred, I would never fight for the cause of the South? Perhaps if I had remained in Virginia I should have gone with my State. It was mainly what I had seen in South Carolina that decided me.

"People said I was a fool for telling Irene; that I should have married her and taken her abroad. The truth is, I was a coward not to tell her sooner. Well, it was out at last. There was no scene—at least there were no angry words. At first I really believe she thought I had gone mad, or was possessed by a devil. It was so incredible to her that a Southern gentleman should, as she thought, descend from his high estate and make of himself a pariah. All that love could do to break the spell Irene did. When she at last understood that a principle was as dear to me as to her—" Lawrence broke off with a short, bitter laugh.

"The scorn of the woman I loved was hard to bear—the harder that my blood is naturally as fiery as her own. I left Beauvoir at once at her request. I left the State too, though not till, after numerous efforts, I saw her once more. She looked me full in the face, and without a sign passed on. In a fortnight she was engaged to a Southern officer; and I

really believe she took the worst she could find just to show how poor a creature she could still think worthier of her hand than Lawrence Preston.

"I went abroad again, and, as you know, had been home less than a year when you came to us. Till a few months ago I thought my heart was dead, as wiser men than I have thought in the same circumstances. It is you who have made me doubt it. What a commonplace set we were before you came—Hugh with his scrupulosities, and Margaret with her sneers and worldliness, and Carrie with her pomps and vanities, and I with my doubts of everybody and everything. And then you came in upon us, like a breeze from your own hills, freshening the humdrum atmosphere and stirring us up—hearts and all. I could never feel again what I did long ago—not for an angel from heaven even—not for Irene herself, could she come back. But"—and Lawrence seated himself at Nan's side—"I am sure I could love you very dearly, and I think I could make you happy. Dear Nan, will you let me try?"

Now, before I tell you Nan's answer, I must tell you what had been her train of thought. All that had been said to her, and especially what had been said by Mrs. O'Neil, had led her to expect a proposal some time; and when she found herself in the boat that afternoon, she thought the interesting and critical moment might be not far off; but when Lawrence began his story she really forgot all

about herself. Her heart was interested, but only sympathetically, and her imagination was still more interested. She began thinking how handsome Dr. Preston was, and what a pretty picture the scene would make — the moss-grown well with its long sweep, and Lawrence leaning against it; a female figure seated on a bench, taking from the open basket a bunch of grapes; on one side the great maples, with their brilliant coloring and their long shadows, on the other the river, with the line of light showing where the water ended and the opposite shore began; the golden haze — though who could paint that? The picture supplied a face for what she had vaguely thought of as a "female figure." Then she fell deeply in love with Irene; planned another picture on the senator's home-coming; changed it into a poem; lastly, sketched the plan of a most moving novel, and getting far ahead of Lawrence, though all the while she was listening to him most intently, had just brought about a highly dramatic situation, when Lawrence's closing words upset it all: "I am sure I could love you very dearly, and I think I could make you happy. Dear Nan, will you let me try?"

"Oh no!" cried Nan, eagerly, "you must wait. The General will die; grief will soften Irene's heart, and she will marry you after all."

Now, as all the world knows, any lady may decline any lover, even if the lady be a Beggar-maid and the lover King Cophetua. But when the lady not only

declines him, but seems quite unconscious of the honor done her, and only anxious to dispose of him otherwise, it is not in human nature not to resent it. Lawrence got angry.

"I suppose women are all alike," he said, with a very red face.

"But," said Nan, still without embarrassment, "it is for your own good. Oh, how could you love any one else after having loved Irene?"

Nan liked to say the name. She had never encountered an Irene in real life, and she thought it a perfect name, linked to a perfect face.

"And after having been so courteously and lovingly treated by her."

"But that was natural. Don't you see she thought her father was a martyr for the South, and how could she turn against him?"

"Probably the Yankee is as unwelcome to you as to her."

"Please don't be angry," pleaded Nan. "I do like Southerners best; but you are a Southerner."

"But you like fire-eaters best—like Mrs. Benjamin, for instance."

Nan laughed, though Lawrence was still angry. "No; it is Mrs. Benjamin's literary powers I admire most. I like a fire-eater like—Irene."

"And not long ago you thought a negro as good as a white man, and were prepared to lift up your voice against flogging."

"Well, I am afraid the mind as well as the sky has changed in my case, though I would still testify against the floggings, if there were any. But what can I know of the feelings of a born Southerner? And yet I should have fought for the South with all my heart."

Lawrence shrugged his shoulders. "Who can find a logical woman?"

"Who can find a just man? Oh, I wish you would not be so angry at Irene!"

Lawrence laughed in spite of himself. "What can Irene matter to me, or I to her, seeing she is Mrs. General le Moine?"

"Mrs. General le Moine! That sounds better than Mrs. General Jones. But you care for her yet."

"Good heavens, Nan! what strange things you say! Men of honor don't care for other men's wives!"

"If you were not so cross you would understand. You care for the ideal of ten years ago—"

"Which was very different from the real Mrs. le Moine."

"But not different from the real Irene. You must wait."

"And do you suppose, then, that men of honor count upon the death of other men?"

"N—o," said Nan, beginning to feel rather foolish. "I did not mean that. I was only thinking of how it might end in a book."

"Just one of your romances," Lawrence said, kind-

ly. "My dear Nan, the wise man in such circumstances does not cherish the lost ideal. He substitutes another."

"But that seems so sad."

"What—that I am asking you to marry me?"

"N—o, not exactly."

"Then will you answer my question?"

"Dear me!" said Nan, "I don't know what to say."

"Then say yes."

"It does not seem right in the circumstances, yet I don't want to make you angry again. Would you mind leaving the subject—*in statu quo?*"

Then Lawrence was conquered. He laughed till the ghosts of the hapless exile and of his evil genius, had they been revisiting their haunts, must have appeared and asked the meaning of it.

"My dear little Nan," he said at last, "you are such a delightful blending of the quaint and the romantic—your Presbyterian uncle and your Spanish mother—that you would make a very sweet ideal yourself. Of course I 'mind,' but to oblige you I will leave the subject—*in statu quo.*"

"Thank you so much!" said Nan, presently, only too happy to have it settled.

"And I think we will agree not to mention it to Lady Cockleorum meantime."

"Of course not."

And this was a wise precaution on the part of Dr. Lawrence Preston.

CHAPTER XXI.

When the pair reached home, tea had long been over; yet Mrs. O'Neil, generally very particular as to Nan's punctuality, looked well pleased. She was seated on the piazza with Mrs. General Jones, who had been giving her an account of the tribulation of her early married life, as occasioned by her father-in-law, whom she always spoke of as Paw Jones.

Margaret, anxious probably to form her own conclusions as to what had occurred during the afternoon, went to the dining-room as soon as possible, and made herself very gracious. She was puzzled. The proposal had not taken away Nan's appetite, nor had the refusal impaired Lawrence's. They were both voraciously hungry.

So Margaret handed over the letters from home—a long one from Tory to Nan among them. And Nan read, and exclaimed, and told bits of news with such zest, that Margaret decided nothing special had occurred.

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Nan, as she came to confidences about a certain young minister. "I meant to take Tory to Spain—"

"Where?" cried Margaret. Lawrence was equally astonished.

Nan laughed. "To one of my castles in Spain, of course. Tory is beautiful enough to be a queen."

Then Nan looked serious enough, and then laughed again. There was trouble at Castle Lowrie. Miss Grizzell, the strong one of the Macalasters, was so ill, Tory wrote, that her recovery was impossible. And yet, even on her death-bed, and apropos of her death, she had played on poor, heart-broken Euphemia a practical joke.

Miss Grizzell on a certain day had been so low that the doctor had said she would scarcely live through the night. The house-keeper and the oldest servants had been in for a parting look, and had gone off sobbing; Sir Alaster and Euphemia, with the attendants, had kept a long watch in the room; when all at once Euphemia, alarmed at her sister being so long motionless as well as speechless, gave the alarm that all was over. They gathered round the bed. The face had for days worn that gray pallor always associated with death, but it seemed to them it was now more pronounced. They lifted her hand; it fell heavily. They spoke to her, tried to draw back the closed eyelids, but there was no sign. Then Euphemia had thrown herself upon the bed beside her, crying, "Oh, Grizzy! Grizzy!" when just as she was about to press the cold lips, "Boo!" said the lips, almost sending poor Euphemia into convul-

sions. *Miss Grizzell had actually been pretending to be dead!*

"And are all the Scotch ladies like that?" asked Lawrence.

"Oh no," Nan said; "but Miss Grizzell is strong-minded."

"I should think so. But it is her friends who should be strong-minded, it seems to me."

"Miss Grizzell," said Margaret, "is a relic of another age. A great many old Scotch ladies used to be like that, as witness all the anecdotes about them. Did you never hear, Lawrence, the remark made by one who was dying when a fearful storm came on? Britons always speak of the weather, you know, and this one, when the roar of the wind and rain reached her, exclaimed, 'Hech, sirs, what a nicht for me to be fleein' through the air!' And so saying, she died."

"An invaluable patient—but I am not sure I should care for her otherwise. And will Nan get like that?"

"She is too great a coward," said Nan for herself.

"I am very glad she is."

"Well, good people," said Margaret, triumphantly, "if you have finished your tea, you may come into the library, where I think I can promise you a surprise."

"Another birthday present, I hope," Dr. Preston said.

"Exactly."

"A dog!" cried Nan.

"Another copy of the 'Proverbial Philosophy!'" guessed Lawrence.

"Come and see," was all Margaret would say.

In the library were Carrie and Mr. O'Neil, both looking pleased and expectant. Margaret opened her desk, took from it a slip of paper, and, in the style of Mr. Campbell offering the congregation's new-year's gift to Mr. Leslie, presented it to Nan; and Nan, unfolding it, beheld a check for three thousand dollars, made payable to Annie MacDonald.

"It is a joke," said Nan.

"A pretty good joke," said Margaret.

"It is Confederate money, then," Nan insisted.

"Is Confederate money convertible into checks?"

"It means pay it in Confederate money then, or—"

"Or fool's gold, or chocolate creams. Don't be a goose, Nan."

"My dear," remonstrated Mr. O'Neil, "you don't make allowance for such a surprise."

"She does not indeed," said Carrie. "It means three thousand real dollars, Nan, and all your very own."

"Please don't deceive me," said Nan, turning pale. "Is it really no joke? You will tell me the truth, Hugh."

Mr. O'Neil was pleased at this appeal to him. "It is no joke, dear Nan, it is three thousand real dollars, and every one of them your own." And

Hugh wished her joy of it, and actually rose and kissed her. Then Margaret kissed her, and Carrie — and Dr. Preston, seeing no disapproval in Mrs. O'Neil's face, followed suit. Nan scarcely noticed it.

She was disposing of the money in a dozen different ways. She was wondering if Margaret would really let her have it all. She would always keep her purse full, and plenty in a drawer besides. Then only did she ask, "Where did it come from?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," said Margaret. So Nan heard two stories in one day; but then it was her birthday. And at least one of them had been held in reserve for the occasion. Nan wondered why all the others left the room before Margaret began.

"Before I tell you where the money comes from I want to tell you something else. Can you bear a great surprise?"

"Oh Margaret, is it good news or bad? Is Miss Grizzell dead? and did she leave me the money?"

"Don't be silly, Nan," Margaret replied, but in unwonted good-humor. "And don't count on anything from Castle Lowrie unless a cat in cross-stitch or a crayon sketch of the departed."

"Please don't make fun of them; they were so good to Tory and me. But oh! what is the news? Is anybody dead—anybody I know?"

"Somebody is dead, but nobody you know."

"Then I don't care. Now, do tell me the news."

"But that is my second piece of news—that somebody is dead. My great surprise for you is that somebody is alive."

"Why, everybody is alive if Miss Grizzell is. Margaret, don't keep me in suspense."

"Well, is there any one of the people you have supposed dead you would specially like to have alive?"

Nan's brain seemed to reel. Margaret little knew the shock she was giving her. Far more faithful to the memory of that grave across the sea than Margaret was, her thoughts flew there instantly, and her imagination was only too ready to supply details. "Mamma!" she cried; then remembering that Margaret had not approved of her saying papa—"I mean *your* mamma."

"Nan!" exclaimed Margaret, much startled, "one would think you were born yesterday. Now, prepare for a pleasant surprise. You knew your mother's name?"

Mercedes Guzman came mechanically to Nan's lips.

"Well, Mercedes Guzman is alive. You have a mother."

At first, to tell the truth, Nan did not feel much pleasure in the disclosure. Mercedes Guzman was all very well as a poetical abstraction, or as some one who had lived. Nan could not quite take in at first that the day for being more than this was not over.

But by the time Margaret had finished her tale Nan was reconciled, pleased, eager. The Spanish plan had to be given up (though of course she would visit the land of her ancestors), but it was the work of a moment to take to pieces, transport, and re-erect in Florida the palace of the Guzmans.

I told the reader long ago that Margaret knew more of Nan's family history than she did herself. She had discovered in Scotland that an aunt of Captain MacDonald and of her mother was still living in Canada, and thinking it could do no harm and might do much good, as she expressed it, she had communicated with her as soon as she reached America.

Margaret could write a very interesting and agreeable letter, and she did her best in addressing Miss MacDonald. Her grand-aunt, however, received her overtures but coldly. She had once upon a time been completely taken in and nearly ruined by Captain MacDonald. She had had enough of nephews and nieces.

Margaret was not to be repulsed, however. She wrote again, sympathizing with her aunt's wrongs, and relating something of what her mother had suffered and her father paid for the family scapegrace. Then she had mentioned Nan's penniless condition; the humble, but happy home she had had in the Manse, and the other home Margaret was determined to offer her in the New World.

Miss MacDonald became interested in spite of herself. She asked anxiously if Nan inherited any of her father's failings; to which Margaret replied that at one time they had feared greatly for her cousin, but that the influence of the family circle at the Manse had done much, while that of her own quiet Christian home might confidently be counted upon to do much more. And then Margaret inquired about the family of Nan's dead mother.

Miss MacDonald replied that when last she heard of Mercedes Guzman she was not a dead, but a living, mother. All she knew of the family was that they were Spaniards who had emigrated to Florida, that the mother was dead, and that Mercedes was the only child. The separation had taken place shortly after the marriage, and Captain MacDonald, with what his aunt thought unpardonable cruelty, had robbed the mother of her baby and sent it to a nurse. It was known that no blame attached to the mother, for the captain had been forced to sign a declaration to this effect. "As to the circumstances of the Guzmans," wrote Miss MacDonald, "I know nothing, but I think I am safe in saying that Alan MacDonald would have married no human being without money, or the prospect of money. A year or two after his death I heard from my lawyer of his widow's marriage, but I never knew the name of the second husband, and I have quite forgotten where

the Guzmans lived. The solicitor who acted for me at that time is dead long ago."

Then there had been a long break in the correspondence; then a letter from a firm of lawyers informing Mrs. O'Neil of Miss MacDonald's death, and of the legacy to Nan; and then in due course the check had arrived.

When Nan had exhausted herself in conjectures as to the appearance, manners, disposition, local habitation, name, and fortunes of Mercedes Guzman, it occurred to her to ask why the money had not been sent to Margaret, as she was just as near a relation. "A mysterious providence," groaned Margaret. "And you are her namesake, it seems." Nan at once offered to divide. Margaret would not accept: was not quite capable of making money out of her own blood, etc. "And you know, Nan," she said, "you have always seemed even nearer to me than Tory." She proposed, however, that Nan should join them in the purchase of land to the extent of half the legacy, while the other half should be placed in bank, to be drawn upon for dress and such matters. Nan was enraptured. Had Margaret only offered her a hundred dollars in cash to put at once into her pocket, she might have had the other two thousand nine hundred. Margaret, for her part, would never have consented to the bank arrangement but that she thought a *trousseau* would shortly be needed. And she had omitted to mention that in consid-

eration of the "quiet Christian home" she was supplying, Miss MacDonald had sent her a handsome sum at the time of Nan's arrival.

So, mutually pleased, though mutually deceived, they parted for the night, and Nan flew up to Carrie to go over the wonderful tidings. It reminded her of the confidences with Tory in the "silent watches," when first they had discussed "M. G."

CHAPTER XXII.

NAN'S star had reached its zenith.

It was known in Willoughby that she had had money left her—not a great deal, people were told, yet they had no idea how little. Some put it as low as twenty thousand dollars, others raised it to a hundred thousand. She had been in a fair way of being spoiled before; she was spoiled now.

Margaret forbade her mentioning the legacy in writing home, so that Nan could not send any part of it there. "I rather think you will find yourself in Scotland before very long," Mrs. O'Neil said, knowingly, "and it will be a thousand times better to give than to send."

So Nan began to spend money on dress; and as Mrs. O'Neil had quite made up her mind the marriage would be soon, she did not object. The search for Mercedes Guzman had been confided to a lawyer — not one of their friends in Willoughby, but a stranger in New York; for Margaret always considered contingencies. And meantime Nan studied Spanish, to prepare herself for the meeting.

She wrote long letters to Tory in which she began

to develop a sarcastic vein, though it was really only an imitation of Margaret. She described the queer kind of mixed society—a few old Southern families who bewailed their lot at having to mix with such people as Rouge-dragon, who had fought, and rich oil men, who had bought, their way in. Those were the days of easily made and easily lost fortunes. Shoddy they knew of in Virginia only by hearsay, but petroleum they had before their eyes. Nan told of Miss Preston's disgust at the *nouveaux riches*, and of some of the eccentricities of the latter, and vowed that the man in California who sued the railway company because his Venus de Milo arrived in a "damaged" condition was not a circumstance to some of the oil people. Then, political feeling was still bitter, and some of the arguments used at election times were amazing. A "carpet-bagger" was "run" for mayor, and in a speech he declared himself the working-men's candidate, and made certain claims on their suffrages. And forthwith his organ was filled with paragraphs in large print adjuring every elector to "*vote for Hiram B. Higgins, the man who never wore trousers till he was ten years old!*"

Then Nan had a hit at the Southern party too. Even Carrie, she said, was absurdly prejudiced, and would not allow her to be intimate with a Northern lady whom she greatly fancied, because this person had been what Carrie considered *improperly far West.* "The idea," Miss Preston had said, "of as-

sociating with a woman who has been at Pike's Peak!" Nan declared she did not see why it should be fashionable to go to the Alps, and pious to go to Mount Ararat, but improper to go to Pike's Peak. She told Tory also of the Hetheringtons, who had lived farther south in great state and glory, and who now had to take boarders. Mrs. Hetherington herself was an elegant, languishing creature, with a neck like Margaret's, only longer; but her children were ill-conditioned cubs—more like Bridget than Mrs. Hetherington. It seemed that through all their vicissitudes they had managed to keep their plate; and Nan used to meet the cubs going for milk with great jugs of solid silver beautifully wrought, but battered almost out of shape by frequent falls and contact with lamp-posts.

Of course Nan wrote of Lawrence—how handsome he was, and how clever; and how old-fashioned Willoughby doctors, who still gave medicine in great horse-doses, and blistered and bled, and even salivated, had looked jealously upon his superior knowledge until some wonderful surgical operations had conquered them. And she wrote of the expedition to the island, and of what had taken place there; and after describing everything as she had planned it for her picture, pronounced it a perfect idyl. She also implored Tory to be slow in accepting any matrimonial overtures, as she, Nan, had plans for her.

It is useless, as I said before, to moralize over what

might have been, or I might lose myself in conjectures as to Nan's fate, had circumstances been different: had she stayed in Strathlowrie; had the "quiet Christian home" had a stronger-minded master or a less worldly-minded mistress; had Lawrence never told the tale of Irene; or had Miss MacDonald never left her the three thousand dollars.

The "Analogy," for which she had expressed such a liking, points out how the world within us and the world without us correspond; how any case of wrong-doing implies outward circumstances falling in with inward desire, and *vice versa*. Every one will admit that the circumstances in Nan's case were favorable for imprudence; and she was Captain MacDonald's daughter.

At first it was pleasant to Nan to talk about her bank account; to remark casually to her young friends that she must go and cash a check, as she really had not more than ten dollars or so left in her purse. She was even guilty of the little vanity of leaving her check-book at Mrs. Benjamin's, and then rushing back to know if they had seen it. But after a while the bank-book was hidden as suddenly as the little savings-box had been years before, and Nan was really afraid to think how much she had spent. Then, to drown reflection, she would go and buy something more.

Sometimes she had studious fits. She would begin a book like the "Anatomy of Melancholy," and

never stop till she knew every word of it; or she would take a turn at her music, and practise three hours daily for about two days. She had more stories and poems and essays begun than she could have finished with six months steady labor. She had half a dozen canvases with "compositions" in various stages—the idyl among them. What would the minister have said to the wasted days? The curse of Reuben was upon her: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

Carrie took her to Baltimore that winter, and she shared the attentions always lavished upon Miss Preston. There she had an opportunity of admiring what was a beautiful feature of Southern character in those days—the courtesy and kindness paid to those who had suffered for the "Lost Cause." There, too, she might have learned again the beauty of honorable independence. There were no bounds to the generosity of those who had managed to retain their wealth except the impassable ones prescribed by those on whom they would have lavished it. High-born, delicate ladies, on whom the winds of heaven had scarce been suffered to blow, lived in single rooms, wherever these were cheapest—in dreary tenements, in attics. Penniless, they did what they could, or what they might — taught, painted, sang, sewed, starved; and the last was the only detail they sought to hide. It was grand that society still delighted to honor them; it was grander that they never thought of declining

such honor, though they would accept nothing else. Clad in some poor, cheap stuff, put together by their own unaccustomed hands, or in some faded silk made in the fashions of the year before the war, they had lost none of their old grace or graciousness; nor did they dream of receiving, any more than their hosts of abating, any of the ancient courtesy. Never was the motto *Noblesse oblige* more honorably put in practice. If pride was with them a vice before the war, it was an heroic virtue after it.

So it came to pass that Nan met Mrs. le Moine; not that Carrie sought her, old friends though they were. "Who can find a logical woman?" Dr. Preston had asked. His sister did not pretend to be logical, any more than to be adventurous like the Pike's Peak woman. She had sympathized with Irene's sentiments thoroughly, but all the same she had never forgiven her for refusing her brother. She had never seen her, and never written to her since. Should she meet her she would be polite, she had decided; certainly not friendly.

It will be remembered that Lawrence had said nothing to Nan of Irene's singing, so that when young Walter Fitzhugh hurried her off from ball-room to music-room one evening to hear somebody sing, she went with no special interest.

But what a voice it was that held every one as in a spell! There was none of the talking or laughing with which polite society, after having worried some

one into a musical effort, generally shows its appreciation. Nan herself paused breathless at the door; she would not move lest she should break the enchantment.

A well-known professor of music was at the piano. The Italian was eager to do justice to the singer, and followed every note with such fierce eyes and absurd contortions of the mouth that it was fortunate no one was looking at him. Nan was quite familiar with the air—the *Involami* from "Ernani," the opera which was then the rage; and she had seen as well as heard it rendered but a few nights before with all the agonies of the operatic stage. This singer stood motionless; Nan could not see the face, but the figure might have been carved in stone.

"Un Eden, un Eden di delizio,"

sang the clear, beautiful voice. It thrilled Nan's heart, and yet it seemed to say so unmistakably that she to whom it belonged was careless of her audience and incredulous of Edens.

"Un Eden, un Eden di delizio."

It was an artistic reproduction of passion; it was not passion itself. What a glorious thing it would be to awaken her heart! Nan thought.

And then the singer turned, and Nan recognized—Irene. Awaken her heart indeed! Nan knew now that what she had missed was not unawakened, but dead.

Nan turned to Carrie, who was near. "It is Irene," she said.

"And what do you know of Irene?" said Miss Preston.

"I will tell you after. Will you introduce me?"

"Certainly not. Was it Margaret who favored you with the story?"

"No," said Nan; "Margaret never mentioned her name."

While this was going on, most of the guests were gathered about Irene, begging for "Furl that Banner!" It was a song not worth much, perhaps, either as to words or music, but it was the requiem of the "Lost Cause."

Irene declined courteously, but peremptorily.

"My dear," said a very disagreeable voice, at once unctuous and wheezy, "I am sure you will oblige our friend by singing your General's favorite."

Nan, looking in the direction of the voice, saw a mountain of flesh seated near the piano. He did not offer to rise, and Nan could conceive it would be difficult. She only wondered that any chair could bear his weight. General le Moine had a bald head, a fierce gray mustache, watery eyes—or, to speak more correctly, brandy-and-watery eyes—and, in spite of Margaret's account to Sophy, the usual number of arms and legs. Though this was an evening party, the mountain was clothed in Confederate gray. It had a pompous voice, constantly interrupted by a

short, asthmatic cough, and seemed to receive a good deal of attention from the fair; and it was as perfect a specimen of the selfish humbug as you would find from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.

Irene at once went to the piano, but motioned the Italian away. She allowed no one to accompany her in that song.

If Nan had missed passion before, she did not miss it now. There are women as well as men to whom love of country is more than love of kindred. So it was now with Irene. Her dead she could love still; they were a part of her patriotism—the dearer for it as it was the dearer for them. But all the love she could not or would not give the living was lavished upon her fallen country.

"That's the sort of song to fire the Southern heart!" said Walter Fitzhugh, triumphantly, when the song ended. "Look at the Beast rubbing his fat old hands and taking all the compliments as if he had sung it himself."

"The beast?" said Nan, inquiringly.

"Yes, the old demijohn. We always call them Beauty and the Beast.

Nan looked at Beauty till Carrie declared she would attract attention. Nan could not help looking. She would have known her anywhere, she decided. But then she had known Irene was in Baltimore, and had been almost unconsciously looking for her. The beautiful face seemed scarcely ten

years older, but it was at least ten years sadder. This was not the radiant Irene of the picture and the old well, nor even the grief-stricken Irene who had gone to receive her dead father; and yet, Nan thought, this was the most perfect of the three. To say she was the loveliest woman Nan had ever seen, is saying little. People who had seen the beauties of both hemispheres declared there was not one like her.

From the face and figure Nan glanced at the dress. How absurd any one else would have looked in it. It was a "shot" silk of ancient make. The wide sleeves had white lace ones beneath. Nan thought, with indignation, of Mrs. General Jones, who had once, Aunt Sally said, been "pore white trash," in her black velvet and lace and diamond cross, and wished to make a redistribution of the good things of this life. And yet it was only turn about. Irene had had her good things, and Mrs. General Jones her evil things, long ago.

"Thank Heaven," said Miss Preston to Nan, as the maid was cloaking her, "it is over at last!" She did not look, however, quite as relieved as the fervor of her words would imply. Was she glad or sorry when, even as she spoke, Irene approached?

The former friends looked at each other. Miss Preston bowed coldly.

But all at once the pale, proud face was transfigured by the sweetest smile, and Irene came nearer.

"I think," she said, "we can afford to bridge over the gulf of ten years by at least a touch of the hand."

And then Miss Preston, utterly conquered, did what she had been longing to do all the time she had been keeping the length of the room apart. She clasped Irene in her arms, burst into tears, and sobbed, "Oh, my darling! my darling!" It was not only men who loved Irene well.

Nan felt herself *de trop*, and thought of vanishing. But Carrie drew Irene towards her.

"Here," she said, "is a little rebel you must love for my sake until she makes you love her for her own. She has been ready to die for the South ever since she saw it, and for you ever since she saw you."

Irene put out both hands with ready grace. The eyes that looked into hers were for the moment almost as bright as her own.

Nan had inherited from her father—or through him from some worthier ancestor—a touch of chivalry that in a lady was odd, but attractive. The white roses she wore were still fresh; at once unfastening them, she handed them to Irene. "My forefathers loved their Lost Cause," she said, "as passionately as you do yours. These are the white roses of the Stuarts."

"Ah!" said Irene to Carrie, as she took the roses, "your rebel has not given me time to care for her for your sake. I love her for her own already."

And then she just touched Nan's cheek with her lips.

Miss Preston and Nan were silent as they drove away, each thinking of the same person. Not so long before Nan had sighed, "Oh, if I might only be one of the nuns of Mother Françoise!" And now her aspiration was, "Oh, if I might only be the Beast!"

Had Nan's wish been gratified, her happiness, as far as this world is concerned, had been of short duration; for General le Moine had an apoplectic seizure a day or two afterwards, and in another day or two obituary notices as pompous as himself, and almost as large, filled the Southern papers.

"Curious coincidence," said Walter, who rushed in with the news. "We always called him Old Apoplexy."

"I thought," said Nan, "you said he was called the Beast."

"So he was; and the Brandy-bottle, and the Demijohn, and the Grumblebug. Jewhilikins! don't I wish I had the writing of the funeral oration! Pecksniff couldn't hold a candle to him."

De mortuis, etc. Irene said no evil of the departed, nor will we.

But was there ever so impulsive a creature as Nan MacDonald? She wrote to Lawrence that the first part of her prediction was fulfilled, and the second would be. "Highlanders have second sight, you

know," she said, "so you cannot escape the fate I foretell for you." By way of answer, Lawrence came and took her home. His sister was going south with Irene. The General, with all his aliases, was to sleep among the Hamiltons.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was not a very light heart that Nan took back to Willoughby. She had something to hide, something to try to forget. For Nan, when she had brought a trouble on herself, never faced it, but simply tried to make believe it was not there.

Mrs. O'Neil remarked her manner at once. She alternated between gayety and depression, and was growing daily more unlike her old self. Lawrence saw the change, and blamed the overrating of her literary work, and, above all, Mrs. O'Neil. That General le Moine's death should make any difference to him he would not allow. It seemed to him that it would be better for Nan, and better for himself, to be married at once. And this time he went to Mrs. O'Neil.

Of course Margaret was delighted to be consulted, and could sincerely promise to aid and abet Lawrence's plans. It was with no little chagrin, however, that she discovered Dr. Preston did not intend to continue the double household. He spoke frankly of his plans. They would go abroad for six months, and that would, he hoped, give Margaret time to ar-

range everything. Of course he should wish his wife to be at the head of her own house; and he added, anticipating Margaret's proposal, he would not be willing for her to be responsible for the comfort of any one, however near and dear, except Carrie, whose home would of course be with them.

Mrs. O'Neil never argued with Dr. Preston. When he left her she took a rapid view of the situation. To occupy the parsonage after Preston Place would indeed be most disagreeable; and if preventing Nan's marriage would have also prevented such a catastrophe, she would not have hesitated half a second; for of course she had looked upon Nan simply as a convenient bridge between the good things of the Prestons and herself, Margaret O'Neil. But Dr. Preston was evidently bent on marrying; and it would be much better to be dispossessed for Nan, whom she had always been able to "twist round her finger," than for a stranger.

So Margaret, having settled the case in her own mind, determined to settle it in Nan's; and going in search of that young person, found her in her room in tears. Pressed to account for them, she could give no other reason than a letter just received from Uncle Robert. The minister had read the conceit and vanity in Nan's late epistles, and had figuratively "taken a dealing" with her.

"Good gracious, Nan!" cried Margaret, "what on earth does it matter, when he is on one side of the

world and you on the other? It all comes from your tattling everything you know. Why, papa knows less about me than he does about the Red Indians. He supposes I preside at female prayer-meetings, and am never without a red petticoat to make or a moral pocket-handkerchief to hem. And I let him suppose it."

"And Miss Grizzell is dead."

"Of course Miss Grizzell is dead; and high time too. Didn't I mention it? What's the use of singing yourself into raptures over 'The Happy Land,' and then howling whenever one of your friends goes there?"

"And—he doesn't think much of my pieces."

"Ah! *there's* where the shoe pinches. Well, neither do I. Don't be furious now. They are very well written, but they're *young*. You will scream over them yourself in five years."

Then Margaret introduced the subject of her embassy, knowing that Nan was never so likely to rush into a new scheme as when she had discovered the vanity and vexation of an old one. But Nan wept on, and would not be comforted. At last she sobbed, "I have no money to get married with."

Then inquiries followed; and had Nan only told the truth, Mrs. O'Neil's anger in present circumstances would have been short-lived; for Margaret never troubled herself about the right or wrong of an action, but judged solely by its effects.

But Nan was a moral coward; and had not Margaret just been giving her a lesson in deceit? So she simply confessed to having spent a good deal of her money, while she knew she would require a very handsome *trousseau*—the Prestons' friends in Baltimore had been so elegantly dressed. And then she would want a great deal for presents to take to Strathlowrie.

Now, the intended land purchase had not been made, and the rest of Nan's money was lying in bank. But Mrs. O'Neil, since her conversation with Dr. Preston, had intended it to furnish the parsonage. It would be a graceful way, she decided, for Nan to mark the close of her guardianship, and she was sure Dr. Preston would consent. It was in vain, however, that she tried to persuade Nan there would be time enough after marriage for the presents. Nan declared she must have all her money, or she would not get married; but that if Margaret thought she was entitled to it, she would make it up afterwards. Then Margaret mentioned the going to the parsonage, not as something that had been suggested to her, but as what her own sense of delicacy must insist upon. And Nan was so grateful and so relieved at the prospect of the money that she all but swore Margaret should not leave Preston Place.

The truth was, that Nan had spent not only all her own money, but two hundred dollars of Miss Preston's. It was only four months since the happy

birthday, and it may be thought that a girl who had never before had more than five pounds at a time—and not that till she was leaving Strathlowrie—could not possibly dispose of over three hundred in four months. But Nan was a born spendthrift, as her father had been before her, and her ideas always rose to the occasion. She had been extravagant with the five pounds, she was extravagant with the three hundred; and if her next windfall had been a million, she would have planned immediate purchases on more than the million scale, and would have been penniless in three or four months more.

When, in Baltimore, she had come to the end of everything, Miss Preston had taken it for granted she had simply not drawn enough for her needs before leaving Willoughby; and I am sorry to say that, borrowed money as it was, Carrie's first hundred went as quickly as the rest had gone, and then Nan applied for a second. Miss Preston was startled, and gave her some good advice, but supposed there had been an extraordinary piece of extravagance which would not be repeated.

Naturally, Margaret wished to know how much there was still in the bank. Nan plunged herself into more difficulties; one lie, as her uncle had always taught her, may lead to a hundred. She and Carrie, she said, had got their accounts mixed up in Baltimore, and she could not tell very well how she stood till Miss Preston came home. Then costly

things had been ordered in Baltimore, and she gave Margaret to understand these were paid for; so that Mrs. O'Neil came to the conclusion that for one who was on the eve of marrying a very rich man, Nan had not done so badly.

Well, the rest of the money was placed to Nan's credit on the distinct understanding that she would marry Lawrence, and Nan was the gayest person in Willoughby for about twenty-four hours. When Lawrence smilingly asked if he might bring up and settle the matter she had left *in statu quo*, she at once acceded. But when he, trying faithfully to put out of his head and heart all the wild thoughts Nan herself had suggested, would have spoken of their married life, she did not care to discuss anything but the going to Strathlowrie. She described to him again and again the church and Manse, and her uncle and Tory. She sang like Rorie and prayed like Peter Duff, and behaved altogether like a madcap.

After twenty-four hours there came a reaction. She believed that, much as she liked Dr. Preston as a friend or brother, she did not care that he should be her husband. But then, if it had only been sacrificing herself and Dr. Preston, she thought she would not have minded. What troubled her most was that another face kept rising continually before her—the beautiful face of one for whom she had declared it would be a pleasure and a privilege to die, if need be. If Irene's pride did not still stand be-

tween her and her old lover, nothing else need now; and yet here was she putting herself between. She felt as mean as when she had hidden herself in the long grass and eaten the six apples. Then Lawrence had a careworn look that touched her. Could it be that he, too, was thinking of what might have been? Nan could have cried sometimes as she thought of it all, but she had made up her mind that nothing could be done about it. They must both (all, if Irene cared) be sacrificed.

Many and many a time Nan wished she could find Mercedes Guzman, and go to her. She did not think so much now of meeting her mother as she had done. She wished specially to save herself from Margaret's anger without giving up either Irene's happiness or her own ease. But for a month or two Margaret had discouraged any reference to Mercedes. It was almost impossible, she said, to trace people after a lifetime's separation; and, after all, she did not know that it was to be desired. What pleasure would there be in meeting when they could not have a thought in common?

Nan gave up her Spanish, and began to sacrifice to fashion after the Chinese method. The Baltimore ladies are noted for their lovely little feet. One of them had told Nan that hers were the largest in Baltimore, and they only required No. 1½ boots, while No. 3 pinched Nan's toes. She determined to confine the unruly members in a pair of No. 2's; and

this not only rendered locomotion difficult, but gave her a woe-begone expression which her friends entirely misinterpreted. Mother Françoise attributed it to the natural remorse suffered by one who had not responded to her vocation. Mrs. Benjamin remarked that the "yearning look" was growing upon her, while Mrs. O'Neil begged her for goodness' sake not to look as if she had cramp colic.

"Why do you stay in the house so much, Nan?" Dr. Preston asked one morning. "Come and walk with me as far as Edith's."

The day was bright; the No. 2's were excruciating. Nan at once decided that *bien chaussée* referred to shape and quality, and was quite independent of size.

So the No. 2's were abandoned forever, and the painful experiment, like most of Nan's experiments, went for nothing.

"Somebody ought to cane those little wretches!" said Nan, as they passed two telegraph-boys on their knees on a sidewalk, each with a message in his left hand and a marble in his right.

"Hi, Doc!" called one of the boys, as he caught sight of the doctor. "Here you are!" and he held up the soiled envelope.

"What does he dare to call you?" said Nan, in wrath.

The doctor laughed. "Young America is not so respectful as young Scotland. When your Prince

of Wales was here they hailed him with 'Hi, Wales!' I suppose this will tell us Carrie is coming."

Lawrence opened the telegram. "Good God!" he gasped.

"Oh, Lawrence!" cried Nan, terrified at his white face; "what is it?"

Dr. Preston regained his composure almost at once. "Nothing to be alarmed about," he said, kindly. "Carrie is—not quite well."

Nan caught the paper and read:

"Carrie taken suddenly ill. Come immediately.

"I. LE MOINE."

Nan burst into tears. Lawrence quietly turned towards home. The big boots did good service.

Nan tried to say she was sorry—sorry for Carrie, sorry for Lawrence—but she could not speak. Did Death spare no one? Were they all going to die? That was the one way of "settling things" she could not think of with equanimity. She wanted to live, and she wanted her friends to live.

How kind Lawrence was to her, trying to make light of the illness to comfort her, when his own heart must be so heavy. In that short walk Nan seemed to care for him as she had never cared before. She wondered if it could be that she had loved him all the while without knowing it. With one of her quick impulses, she decided she loved him

well enough to make a sacrifice for his sake, and not the one she had intended making.

"Lawrence," she said, hurriedly, as they reached the gate, "let me go with you to the station, please. I have a special reason."

"Surely, dear. How good of you to think of it!" returned Lawrence, his face almost brightening.

So at the first train for the South they stood together, an hour or two later; Sam at a discreet distance. Nan waited till the last possible minute, and then she slipped a sealed note into Lawrence's hand.

"Promise that you won't read it," she said, "till just before you leave Beauvoir."

"But is it bad or good?"

"Good, of course; altogether good. Do you think I could give you anything bad to-day?"

"Then I promise."

Shriek! The train was off. Nan was alone on the platform; she had a desolate feeling as if alone in the world. She went home, pleaded headache, and cried herself to sleep, which Mrs. O'Neil thought silly, but satisfactory.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was impossible that Lawrence should, in the circumstances, give more than a passing thought to any one but Carrie. And yet it was also impossible that he should find himself on the way to Beauvoir, in any circumstances, without thinking of former journeys, and of her for whom they had been taken. His spirits did not rise with the thought. When last he had passed southward, a beautiful and prosperous country, teeming with evidences of wealth and luxury, had been spread out before him. Now all was desolation and decay. Here a few charred timbers told of some noble mansion wantonly burned; there a negro sat smoking his corn-cob pipe on the front piazza of a place whose name was historic. The rich acres lay uncultivated. The mass of the newly enfranchised were slow to believe that liberty could possibly mean labor. Had not their prophets told them not only that their oppressors should fall, but that they, the oppressed, should sit in their places? Old-time slaves had been satisfied to postpone such a happy state of things to another world. Their idea of heaven had been that there the blacks

should sit at the table, while the proud white folks should "grease de griddle and turn de cakes." But the enthusiasts—half religious and half political—of war times were for no postponements. Heaven, without waiting for them to come to it, was to come at once to them. The popular idea was summed up in the chorus:

"De massa run, ha! ha!
De darkey stay, ho! ho!
It mus' be dat de kingdom's comin',
An' de year ob jubilo!"

Lawrence thought of the proud owners of these deserted plantations — some dead; some in foreign lands; some in cities, working for the merest pittance; some clinging yet to the ancestral acres, with low-born adventurers, and even negroes, ruling them —and began to comprehend that though ultimately the crisis through which the South was passing might be the redemption of the whites even more than of the blacks, it was more bitter than death to the generation passing through it.

He had told Nan that he was naturally as proud as Irene, and he had tried after the General's death to hurry on his marriage, because he had felt it as impossible to forgive as to be forgiven.

But passing through the desolate land, he felt more kindly to the proud, sensitive woman who had scorned him. He wondered what her life had been with her husband. The world held two opinions in

regard to the General, though it had only published one. But every one spoke of Irene as a model of wifely duty.

Well, what did it matter now? It was Death, not Love, thought Lawrence, that was claiming him to-day; for a sad presentiment had settled upon his heart.

He reached the once beautiful city; and here, even more than in the country, ruin stared him in the face. It had stood in the way of Sherman in his march to the sea.

Did he recall the stately coach, with its high-bred horses and liveried servants, that used to be in waiting? or Harry's handsome, reckless face and dare-devil driving? or—

"Marse Lawrence! Marse Lawrence!" cried a tremulous but joyful voice. An old negro in tatters that a scarecrow would have refused had doffed his crownless beaver, and stood smiling and bowing. "My humble respecks, Marse Lawrence. Dis is a sight good foh ole eyes, sah!"

Lawrence stared. "Great heavens!" he cried, "it is Uncle Zeke," and he seized the scarecrow's hand. "How is my sister?"

"Miss Car'line, bress de Lord, is bettah, sah, an' out ob danger. Dem is Miss Irene's own words, Marse Lawrence."

"Thank God!" said Lawrence. "And this is really you, Uncle Zeke?"

Uncle Zeke beamed. "Minerba done said—you remembahs Minerba, sah?—dat young Marse Lawrence nebbah know me widout de libery. An' I done tole Minerba, sah, dat I wan't skeared. No, Marse Lawrence, I wan't one mite skeared."

Uncle Zeke waved his hand towards a rickety old omnibus drawn by a spavined horse.

"De stables, Marse Lawrence, is not what dey used to was. But dis yere hoss, sah, is better to go dan to look at. Got a deal ob life in him, Marse Lawrence."

The wretched piebald's looks certainly belied its reputation. Lawrence could have laughed in old Zeke's face, only it was all so pitiful. He climbed into the musty omnibus.

"Miss Irene an' Miss Car'line drobe home in dis yer kerridge, Marse Lawrence," said Uncle Zeke, as he closed the door. "De remains was nigh onto a day's work for a mule. Powerful heavy remains, Marse Lawrence." And the piebald shambled off.

Outward circumstances were still depressing, yet Lawrence's spirits had risen — the relief in regard to Carrie was so great. Then Irene had been in the omnibus, and so what did it matter that the lining was ragged and mildewed—that straw hung out of the cushions—that the glass had long since disappeared—and that a peculiar one-sided jolt seemed to indicate the probable failing of a wheel? He almost thought he could discern the faint odor of violets, that to him was always associated with Irene. He

would not light the cigar he had taken out; it seemed desecration.

The drive to Beauvoir used to occupy an hour. With the piebald it required nearly four. Dr. Preston would have got out and walked but for fear of seeming to scorn the humble conveyance.

But could this be Beauvoir at which they arrived at last? The fences were burned, the plantation was uncultivated, the pleasure-grounds lay waste, the mansion-house was a shell. The omnibus passed the front entrance, from which a double flight of steps had disappeared, leaving the door high in air, and drove to the side of the house, where Irene awaited her guest. In deep mourning she had been when Lawrence parted from her last; in deep mourning she was, now that they met again. She was pale and sad, but showed no traces of resentment or coldness as she extended her hand, apologizing for having given a false alarm, and telling him their physician had approved the sending for him.

Lawrence assured her smilingly that men of his profession liked false alarms rather than over-confidence in nurses.

And then he was shown by Uncle Zeke to a suite of rooms he well remembered. They had been Harry's in the old days, and had been filled with all the luxuries that a travelled young man of many whims, and the power of gratifying them all, could gather together. Now they were like all the other rooms

in the house—carpetless, bare, destitute of all but the commonest necessaries of life.

Minerva was in waiting to take him to Miss Preston. He went with a beating heart. Old memories were crowding upon him. Carrie was in the apartment that used to be his own.

Surely there was a magic about Beauvoir that made people look and feel young again. Carrie was ten years older than Irene, though they had once been intimate and dear friends; but as she lay there on her sofa, smiling at her brother, who had knelt to kiss her, Lawrence thought he had never seen her look so well. She had not been a celebrated beauty like Irene, but some people had admired her style more. Long ago Lawrence had called them Night and Morning.

Very fair Morning looked now—her delicate complexion and hair set off by a robe of soft misty blue, her eyes bright with pleasure at her brother's coming. There was an indescribable softness and naturalness about her which Lawrence could remember, but which certainly had not been Carrie's characteristic of late years. She passed her fingers caressingly through his short, crisp hair.

Of course in his professional capacity Dr. Preston wished to know all about her illness, but Carrie declared he should not talk shop to her, and that consulting physicians addressed the regular doctor and nurse. So Lawrence gave her the home news—all

but the arrangement about the speedy marriage, which, he scarcely knew why, he did not care to talk about then.

"Now, Lawrence," Carrie said, before he went down to tea, "I want you to do me a favor. Mrs. Eustace, our clergyman's wife, is coming to sit with me for an hour, and I want you to take Irene out—to *make* her go and get a breath of air."

Dr. Preston smiled. "Irene is scarcely the person to be made to do anything."

"Irene is just the person to be made. Do as I tell you."

Lawrence still demurred. "I hope Mrs. Eustace is not like Mrs. Tolivar," he said.

"Mrs. Eustace is an angel," said Carrie, emphatically. "In person she is just a frank, pleasant girl, but she has the courage of a heroine and the soul of a saint. Wait till you know her."

"I hope she is not unequally yoked with a Tolivar."

"Wait till you see them both. Mind, I don't admit that Mr. Tolivar is not a good man because he has a doughy face and indigestion. But such as he is, don't blame the Church for him. You might as well blame the Presbyterians for Margaret."

"I am not sure that I don't."

"Then you are very unjust. Get Nan on the subject of her uncle and aunt, and then you will believe what Mr. Leslie used to say, that Margaret must be a changeling."

"But about this Eustace?"

"Wait till you see him. I won't say another word."

So, Minerva coming with the invalid's tray, Lawrence went down, his heart beating faster than ever at the thought of a *tête-à-tête* tea. He wondered if Uncle Zeke would wait in his driving costume, or if they had other servants.

There was to be no *tête-à-tête*, at any rate. A young lady whom he would have taken for a schoolgirl was already in the dining-room—no other than the clergyman's wife.

Lawrence thought the massive silver and rare china of former meals would scarcely have improved the simple board. Everything was of the plainest, but nothing was unrefined. Minerva had done her best with the chicken and waffles, and "'lowed Marse Lawrence had neber eaten no better;" Irene had seen to the coffee; and Mrs. Eustace, with the utmost nonchalance, sallied out from time to time for hot supplies. Then there was a mass of delicate wood violets in a border of moss, and the clergyman's wife was bright and entertaining, and Irene pleased to see her guests taking to each other. Altogether, Lawrence thought he had rarely enjoyed a banquet so much.

"Now, Dr. Preston," said Mrs. Eustace, as they left the dining-room, "I am to be nurse for the next hour, and I hope you will persuade Mrs. le Moine

to go out, if it is only for ten minutes; she has never crossed the threshold since she came, six weeks ago;" and Mrs. Eustace ran up-stairs.

"I hope you will go," said the doctor; "Carrie is so anxious about you."

"Unnecessarily," said Irene. "I never even have a headache. But I will go with you, certainly. A solitary walk through desolate Beauvoir might frighten you away. I need not ask where you would like to go," she added, with a melancholy smile. "Lawn and garden and grove—all are alike now."

CHAPTER XXV.

"Did you ever," asked Irene, "read the story of the man without a country? The unfortunate was an American who, having in a rash moment expressed the wish that he might never hear his country's name, was punished by having his wish fulfilled. He was placed on a man-of-war going on a long cruise, and from that, as it neared home, exchanged to a second, and from a second to a third, and so on till he died. And the officers of each, though treating him with perfect courtesy, were forbidden to mention America or the slightest item of American news in his hearing. Of course love of country became a passion with him. I think he must have died of a broken heart, though the story does not say so."

"It seems to me," Lawrence said, "that the punishment was out of all proportion to the offence."

"Yes, we will hope it is only a story. But do you know, I almost envy the man without a country. I am not sure that it would not be better to be out of sight and hearing of all that mine has to endure."

Lawrence felt embarrassed. It seemed disingenuous to let her limited application of the word coun-

try pass; and yet he sympathized with her as never before.

"Ah!" said Irene, reading his thoughts, "you think I will be angry if you differ from me. We are no longer children, and I can believe that people better and wiser than I, and quite as sincere, may differ from me."

"And believe me," said Lawrence, "I never fully appreciated till the last two days how, setting out with the idea that the first step was right, one would find it impossible to forgive all the ruin and desolation."

"Do you think so? And yet this is peace. We have wrongs to remember harder than any humiliations they can heap upon us to-day. I wonder what you would have thought of all that was done in Columbia?"

"In Columbia!" exclaimed Lawrence. "You were not there? They never could have been so mad, so wicked as to let you stay!"

"I was there," said Irene, quietly, "and no one was mad or wicked. My husband was far away. Relations and friends did their utmost to induce me to leave. My aunt refused to go, and of course I remained."

"It was selfish of her to permit it," said Lawrence, indignantly.

"It was not selfish of her to permit it," Irene said, in the same quiet tone. "She was suffering from an

incurable disease. She knew it would be death to her to go, and it could not be more than death to stay. Faithful Minerva was with her, and she exhausted herself in entreaties and commands for me to leave her."

"And you would not?"

"No, I would not," said Irene, a flash of the old fire in her eye. Then, regaining her calm, she went on to tell the story of the taking of the city; of making her way with her aunt to headquarters to ask for a guard; of the horrors of those first terrible nights and days when, unable to believe in the honor of Northern soldiers, they sat through the weary hours, inwardly terrified but outwardly unmoved; of the return afterwards to ruined Beauvoir, when starvation at last stared them in the face.

"Starvation!" cried Lawrence—"starvation! It cannot be that you have ever been hungry?"

"Many a time. Believe me it is not so hard—for one's self, that is; it was bitter to see my aunt suffer. One morning, after existing for days on a little cornmeal, we had literally nothing with which to break our fast. As night drew on, we gave ourselves up for lost. We were so weak, we had sat for hours motionless. Now and then my dear aunt put out her hand and feebly stroked mine; it almost broke my heart. Minerva was not with us at the time; and when suddenly a loud knock came to the door, I could scarcely get up to open it. A negro stood there

with a large bag of flour on his back—*flour*, mind, which we had not seen for many a day. 'For Miss Irene,' he said, and vanished. I always call him the Black Angel."

"And where was Uncle Zeke?" Lawrence managed to ask. "I am glad he at least has been faithful."

"Faithful! Hundreds of them would have been that. We had to force them away; we would not let them stay and starve. Uncle Zeke remained till Minerva taunted him with taking the bite out of Miss Irene's mouth—then he went."

"But he is with you now?"

"Uncle Zeke? Why, he drives the omnibus in which you came."

"Oh, I thought—"

"I see," said Irene, smiling. "He has thought it for the credit of the family to play coachman still. Did he say the coach was under repairs, or what?"

"He was far above that;" and Lawrence laughed at the recollection. "He spoke of the omnibus as the kerridge.

"Why, who is that?" he continued. "He is dressed as a clergyman, yet looks every inch a soldier."

"He is both; or, rather, he was the one and is the other. It is Mr. Eustace." And Irene, introducing the clergyman, they all walked into the house together. Mr. Eustace had been colonel of a Virginia regiment, and had served on General Hotspur Fitz-

hugh's staff. He had adored his chief, and was delighted to meet his cousins.

"Ah!" said the clergyman, as Irene left them, "there is a mission unfulfilled. Mrs. le Moine was born to be a hero's wife. If she had only married Hotspur!"

Hotspur, indeed! Lawrence could not echo the wish. Hotspur's fame had been won in his absence, and he was apt to forget it. However, though disapproving of the clergyman's thought, he did him the justice to think he looked not unlike a hero himself, and wondered if he did not find his new profession strangely unsuited to him. He was judging, as so many people do, that a man who was every inch a soldier was in his element in material warfare, while any puny creature would do to cope with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Eustaces left almost at once, and Lawrence went back to his sister. Carrie insisted on Irene's remaining also. How cheery, thought Lawrence, even the large, bare room looked, with a bright fire and two such women as Night and Morning. The invalid's blue gave a touch of color, so did the flowers on a table at her side. Carrie declared herself almost well, and Irene testified to her increasing appetite. And yet Lawrence looked anxiously at her. She was so gentle, so affectionate: could it be the association with Irene? or was she worse than they feared? He felt her pulse anxiously, and listened to

the beating of her heart. Carrie laughed, and said he was quite like a lover, but that it was very nice. Very nice Lawrence thought it all when he had satisfied himself about Carrie. His thoughts ran riot even when he was talking decorously. He began to build castles in the air, as was Nan's wont, but checked himself. Irene was but a six weeks' widow. He was a man of honor, and Nan was his betrothed.

But something his sister said set his heart wildly beating again. Irene had left the room; and when Lawrence, after watching her out of sight, turned to Carrie, he found her steadily regarding him. She drew his head down to hers, and whispered in his ear,

"Trust a woman for reading a woman. Irene is one of those who love but once; and the one love of her life is—Lawrence Preston."

And refusing to hear a word in reply, she kissed her brother and dismissed him for the night.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Lawrence went to his room, but not to sleep. He prided himself on being a thoroughly practical person, who looked at stern facts and indulged in no fancies. But he had not always been so, and to-night the hands on the dial of time seemed to have moved backward.

Carrie's words haunted him, and yet he did not believe them. No; Irene had been kind, friendly, cordial, but had thought no more of the old passages in their life than if she had just landed from some far-off star.

And he himself—did he still love her? or could he still love her, supposing he were free?—which, he reminded himself sternly, he was not. Would not any one have felt as he did, listening to that quiet recital of suffering so patiently borne? He must have seemed cold, unsympathetic — brutally so, he said to himself; for he had had to fight down with a will of iron the feeling that was almost overmastering him. The tender, delicate woman, the queen of society at home, the guest of princes abroad, *had been hungry*—not once, but many times. Law-

rence caught his breath, and rose and paced the room.

Oh, if he could but have clasped her to his heart, and blotted out by a lifetime of devotion the very memory of those terrible days! But the beautiful eyes which once had looked at him so lovingly had turned to him with such utter unconsciousness of any possible embarrassment or recollection. He remembered her words, "We are no longer children." Ah! that was it. Her love for him had been but a girlish fancy, which it could not give her even the slightest uneasiness to recall. He had always wondered at her choice of him; she had explained it. He did not suppose for a moment that she had loved the General, although she had doubtless, when she married him, hoped that love would come. Then her heart must still be free. Suppose he were to try again. But then, there was Nan.

What a tangle he had made of it all! Nan was not in love with him, and yet he had made her promise to marry him. If he had only left the matter "*in statu quo.*"

Then he began to think of Nan. What a quaint way she had of putting things! What a dear girl she was if left to herself, or at least taken away from Margaret's influence! And how different she had seemed that last day—almost as if she really cared! He remembered the note, took it out and looked at it, and wondered, as he put it back, if he would remember

to look at it before leaving. From Nan he went back to Irene again, and from Irene to Nan. But when at last he fell asleep, it was to dream of Irene only.

Sometimes he was back with her in the Beauvoir of old; sometimes he was listening to her story again; sometimes he was reproducing the scenes of the taking of the city. One picture seemed to impress itself upon him with awful distinctness.

He dreamed that Irene had gone in search of a guard while he had gone in search of Irene. He wandered up and down the silent and deserted streets, visible only by that ghostly light common in dreams. He heard the sound of voices and the crash of arms, but faintly, as at a great distance; and though he was constantly moving in their direction, they seemed as constantly to recede. Suddenly there was a crash and a blaze, and by the glare of a burning house he could see the parties struggling; then all was dark and silent as before. Again and again came the crash and the blaze, each time lasting longer, till the whole city seemed wrapped in flames. And then he heard his name called by Irene in piercing tones of anguish, "*Lawrence! Lawrence! Lawrence!*"

The cry awoke him. Merciful heavens! was the dream, then, true? The room was light as day, and filled with stifling smoke. To dress himself partly was the work of an instant. Opening the door, he

found his passage barred by volumes of flame and smoke. He heard the piercing cry of his dream, "*Lawrence! Lawrence! Lawrence!*"

In the horrors of the reality Lawrence recovered his self-possession. In an instant he recollected that the wing in which Carrie and Irene were could be reached most speedily by another door. He sprang to the window; it did not open at once. He dashed the sash out, and was through it in a moment. It was the wing that was on fire, and Irene stood at a window, looking as if she were framed in flames. It might be that they were behind her, and if so, would he reach her in time? It might be only their reflection. Not a human being was near, but there were voices in the distance.

The windows were high; the verandas of other days had disappeared; there was no ladder, or anything that might serve for one. Fortunately it takes less time to act than to describe action. "Courage!" Lawrence cried to those above. "I will be with you in a moment!" Would he be able to keep his word?

Crash went another sash, and he was in the thick of it. Well it was for them all that he knew Beauvoir as thoroughly as Preston Place. He reached the room at last. Irene was on the floor supporting Carrie. "Quick!" she said, placing her in Dr. Preston's arms. "She has fainted. I will follow you."

"Not for worlds!" said the doctor. "Remain close to the window till I come again. Remember!"

While he spoke he had wrapped his sister in a blanket and was off. His intention had been to take both and make a bold dash through the flames, but now he had to fight his way with this dead weight. The flames scorched him. And up there was that other waiting. He reached the foot of the stairs at last, almost threw his sister into the arms of some one who was hurrying forward, and rushed into the flames. Irene was at the window. She was quite calm now. "Lawrence," she said, earnestly, as he approached, "you cannot save both. Leave me, I beseech you, and save yourself!" And she smiled bravely.

He took her in his arms. "Oh, my darling!" he said, almost with a sob, "I don't know whether I can save you, but I can die with you at any rate."

But for the clergyman Lawrence would indeed have died with and for Irene. By the time Mr. Eustace reached Beauvoir there were about a dozen negroes on the scene — weeping and wailing and giving contradictory accounts of where the ladies were, and what was being done. It was to him Lawrence had handed his sister. To place Miss Preston in his wife's care, single out as aid a stalwart young negro who only needed direction, seize the wet blankets which Mrs. Eustace, with admirable presence of mind, had been providing, and turn

back into the mansion-house, was with the clergyman the work of an instant. In five minutes they were back with their unconscious burdens. They had reached them only in time.

Mrs. Eustace saw her husband rush back into the flames, then turned to her charge. She had already quieted the negroes, had Minerva roused from her room near Lawrence's, and had ordered out the mattresses from Lawrence's bed. When her husband came back, she said to herself, "Thank God!" That was all. And Mrs. Eustace was a bride of two months. I do not know what the Southern women of to-day are, but those of war times were the bravest in the world.

"Dr. Monteith," Mrs. Eustace called to a gentleman who had just appeared, "come and look at Miss Preston. I never knew a fainting fit last so long."

Dr. Monteith stooped down and scrutinized his patient, then stepped hurriedly to the clergyman. "Call your wife away, Eustace," he said, "and keep her busy. Miss Preston no longer needs her care."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IRENE, in her capacity of nurse, had occupied a sofa in her guest's room on the fatal night. Like Lawrence, she had been reproducing in her dreams the horrors of war times, when she awoke to find all that was left of the once ancient home of the Hamiltons in a blaze. It was with difficulty she could take in at first what was occurring, and only by a supreme effort that she could overcome the giddy, suffocating sensation sufficiently to rouse herself, gain the window, and then try to awaken Miss Preston. Finding Carrie still unconscious, she had taken her to the window and done her utmost to restore her, not dreaming that it was even then too late. And so one was taken and the other left.

"One shall be taken and the other left." That was the refrain that rung in Lawrence's ears and heart as, accompanied by the kind clergyman, he took his sad journey northward. He had intended bringing his sister home. He was bringing her home, but not as he had intended. The sister had been taken and the brother left.

Upon none, after Dr. Preston, did the tidings come

more crushingly than upon Nan. It was but the second time that death had taken one dear to her; and the first time, though a dearer had been taken, she had not seen, but only missed, her aunt. Now, for the first time in her life, she had to look upon the dead. She remembered how, just before her visit to Baltimore, Mrs. Benjamin had been expressing surprise that she had never seen a dead person. Rouge-dragon had extraordinary views on death as on life. She thought there was a moral cowardice in not familiarizing ourselves with what we must all come to. Death was the consequence of sin, and to hesitate to look upon its effects argued a want of acquiescence in the will of God. When Mrs. Benjamin left, Carrie had expressed herself strongly in regard to her, remarking that the younger Benjamins spent their Sundays in going to three Sunday-schools and looking at dead bodies. And now here were those very ghouls coming to condole, and asking if they might look at "the remains." *Could* it be that Carrie had lost not only life but identity, and was spoken of simply as "the remains!"

Nan stole into the darkened room with Lawrence. She had heard every one say Miss Preston looked so "natural," and she expected to see her as one in a deep sleep. Natural! There were indeed no outward signs of decay, but it was the shadow, the shrunken shadow, of her friend. But for Lawrence she would have turned and fled. The weird feeling

of those lonely days in the Manse came back to her, and now there was no Tory to cheer her. Margaret jarred upon her more than ever. Phyllis came to her with loud lamentations. "Oh, Miss Nan, I done tole things about her to Miss Ma'g't, an' I lub her ole shoes bettah nor ebry bit ob Miss Ma'g't's whole body." Phyllis's was not the only reproachful conscience. Nan was learning how the same hand that effaces also revives and intensifies. Carrie's failings vanished, and her own became crimes.

When six months had passed since the funeral Dr. Preston came to Nan again. He confessed that he was restless, that he found it impossible to settle down to the old life, and he asked her to marry him at once very quietly, and to go abroad as they had intended.

Nan was in great trouble. In her real sorrow for Carrie she had for a time forgotten everything else; and it was not till Margaret spoke to her about the marriage that she remembered the two hundred dollars she owed Carrie. When she allowed Margaret to think that matters were the other way—that Carrie had money of hers in her keeping—she had intended to take Miss Preston into her confidence and tell her the real state of the case. But Nan's good intentions were apt to remain good intentions. She would not write, she decided; it would be much easier to explain face to face. In reality it would have been much more difficult; it was only an excuse for

delay. Meantime she went on as she had done—writing large orders to Baltimore, buying anything she happened to see, until she not only did not know how much she had become liable for, but had not the courage to set herself to find out.

And then she had a double trouble now—a sore heart, as well as an uneasy conscience; for at last she loved Lawrence. She did not know whether it was her love itself, or only the consciousness of her love, that had begun on the day of the telegram; she only knew that she had loved him ever since. And day and night she was pondering the question, Should she marry him, or should she not?

At last she went to Margaret, and in despair told her of the two hundred dollars. Why, having courage to do that, she did not tell the whole, Heaven knows. Her confessions were apt to lose all merit as confessions through not being full.

Now it happened that Margaret was already perfectly aware of the true state of the case as regarded the transactions with Miss Preston. Nan's manner had made her suspect something, and in looking over Carrie's memorandum-book she had come upon the two items charged to Nan; for Miss Preston, though rich, was not above being methodical.

Of course Margaret professed to be properly shocked at the extravagance first, and then at the dissimulation. It was only when she found Nan's remorse might possibly carry her to inconvenient

lengths that she proposed letting by-gones be by-gones. She did not wish to mar her happiness at such a time, etc., and she was sure Nan would never forget how she, Margaret, had stood her friend. And then Nan did the one brave and self-sacrificing act of her life, and she did it in such a way as to render it irrevocable. She wrote a note to Dr. Preston, releasing him, and saying she had positively decided not to marry him. She reminded him that she had only entered into the engagement at his earnest entreaty, and that she had done so loving him as a friend and brother, but not at all as one should love a husband. But of the real love that had entered her heart since, she said not one word.

Dr. Preston was deeply hurt. Since the night of the fire his mind had dwelt but little on love; and the moment he found thoughts of Irene coming back again, he determined to end all temptation to disloyalty by an immediate marriage. And this was to be the end of it.

"So you are like all the rest," he said to Nan, more wearily than bitterly. "Affection goes for nothing compared with the triumph of declining it."

"Poor Nan! She knew she was making Margaret her bitter enemy, and involving herself in inextricable troubles, all for love of Lawrence and Irene. And here she was passing in the opinion of the person she cared most for in the world as a heartless

jilt. Had Carrie lived, the sacrifice would not have been so terrible (she had felt that Carrie did not care for the marriage, though she had always been kind), but now she was dooming herself to remain alone with Margaret. She hastily decided she would be an authoress without delay, or she would teach—anything not to remain when they were gone. All these sad thoughts and plans bewildered her, and made her seem to Lawrence cold and indifferent.

"Well," said the doctor at last, "it shall be as you wish." And he turned to go.

"Stop, Lawrence," cried Nan, choking back her tears. "Will you mind telling Margaret?"

"Ah! I see," with a bitter smile. "It was to please her you engaged yourself. I will make it all right.

"But," said Nan, determined not to break down, "there is something else. I owed Carrie (here a tear would fall) two hundred dollars, and here it is."

Nan had brought her last two hundred.

Lawrence saw the tear and softened. "Oh, child," he said, "you can dismiss me without that, surely. Listen to me," he went on, earnestly, as Nan still tried to put the notes into his hand. "Had Carrie lived to make a will, you would have shared with me all she had. I know it, because she told me so, and I shall carry out her wishes. So, you see, my dear Nan, the money is honestly your own."

"Did she really—"

"She did really propose what I have said. Now I am off to see Margaret at once."

Nan listened to the receding footsteps, then threw herself upon the floor. "And I called her Ninon," she sobbed, "and laughed at her with Margaret. Oh, Carrie, Carrie!"

She had learned before that the dead do not come back; she learned now that they cannot speak their forgiveness, though we seek it carefully and with tears.

When Dr. Preston had left the house Mrs. O'Neil came upon Nan—not in fire, but ice.

"You are determined to abide by your decision?" she asked.

"Yes," said Nan.

"Not knowing what the consequences may be?"

"Yes."

"So be it," said Margaret. "As you have made your bed, so you will lie on it." And Margaret went.

At tea Nan heard more than one piece of news. Mr. O'Neil had had some weeks before a call to Halifax, and he had just decided—that is, Margaret had just decided—to accept it. And she had so decided because Dr. Preston had told her Preston Place was to be sold. The doctor was to sail for France on the following week, and one of the Fitzhughs would manage everything. Dr. Preston was not present when this news was told.

Nan tried to be friendly with Margaret, she felt

so desolate. She began to speak of Halifax; she thought she would like, she said, to go North. Margaret smiled a strange smile, but said nothing.

The last few days of Dr. Preston's stay Nan scarcely saw him. There was at the last a hurried good-by, in which she quite broke down; and while she was breaking her heart at home, Mr. O'Neil and Margaret saw Dr. Preston off. Lawrence had dealt generously with them; and besides, as I have already said, Margaret always considered contingencies.

When Dr. Preston had said good-by he hesitated, then turned again to Mrs. O'Neil. "Be good to Nan," he said.

"Good to Nan!" echoed Mrs. O'Neil. "I verily believe Lawrence thinks I beat her." (This smilingly to her husband.)

Dr. Preston deprecated such a thought.

"Well," Margaret said, "I will relieve your mind by a bit of news which you would have heard before, only that you have been so occupied. Nan is going to her mother."

"Her mother!" Has Mercedes Guzman actually been found?"

"Mercedes Guzman has actually been found. So you can imagine Nan realizing her dreams of Murillo's Madonna among the orange-groves of Florida."

"And her address?"

"I cannot give it exactly, but she will send it."

"And her letters will be forwarded?"

"Oh, of course."

"My dear," said Mr. O'Neil, as they went home, "have you not decided rather hastily about Nan's going?"

"My dear Hugh, when I give you the history of the idleness and extravagance of the last few months, and of the deceit practised upon me, I think you will say it is true kindness to let her rough it a little."

"But we know nothing of her mother."

"We know that she is perfectly respectable. Indeed, my mind is quite made up to do my duty in the matter; so there is no use saying another word."

So Mr. O'Neil felt. Lawrence, meantime, thinking of the change for Nan, had said to himself more than once, "Thank God!" And then he added, "I think Nan might have told me."

By the time Mrs. O'Neil had ignored Nan for a week the latter might have been glad to go anywhere. Yet when Margaret told her news as icily as she had spoken ever since Lawrence left, Nan was not glad. She liked Willoughby; she had made hosts of friends there, and she knew nothing about this unknown mother who was claiming her. The wish for mother-love that had once filled her heart had given place to another feeling. Nan wanted to stay where everybody knew Lawrence. And then, though Margaret was so cold and hard now, she had once been kind, and she was a part of her old happy life in the Manse and a link with the grave across

the sea. Nan thought she could not go. She went to Margaret and asked to be allowed to stay. Margaret curtly told her that the matter was settled. Then Nan asked if she might board somewhere in Willoughby, and teach or write. Mrs. O'Neil asked her if she knew any one who would trust her with their children after the extravagance and deceit of the last few months. Nan thought, from the mention of deceit, that Mrs. O'Neil had found out about the orders in Baltimore, and she felt there was reason to be angry with her. Lastly, Nan asked if she might go back to Scotland.

"To Scotland! Have you any one there to offer you a home?"

Nan stammered out something about the Manse. Margaret sneeringly asked if her father had such a fondness for the spendthrift and the liar and the robber of the dead as to make her think he would receive her back. When Nan, objecting to be called a robber of the dead, related how she had told the story of the money to Dr. Preston, Mrs. O'Neil declared she did not believe her, and she called her an unnatural daughter for not wishing to go to her mother.

When Nan saw it was all up with her, she made up her mind to make the best of it; so it speedily became known in Willoughby that Nan was going to relatives in Florida. Margaret would not let her say what relative. "They would think her a strange

mother," she said, "who would let her daughter be nearly twenty years in the world without ever asking if she was alive or not."

But before Nan went she did something worse than all. The Baltimore people becoming pressing, she borrowed a leaf from her father's experience, and executed and forwarded an I O U. Not being very sure what she owed them, and wishing to prove herself a generous patron, she named an amount nearly double that of her real debt.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LONG, fatiguing journey brought Nan to the town nearest her mother's home. Most people would have hesitated before sending one of her age so far alone; but Mrs. O'Neil pronounced Nan "sharp enough to look out for herself." Margaret had written to announce her arrival, and Nan's heart throbbed fast at the thought of the meeting; but as the train ran up to the small station she could see no lady or white woman of any kind, and there was no carriage in waiting. What should she do? Fortunately, they had reached the place early in the day.

Nan asked a rough but kindly looking man how far it was to Bliff's Corners.

"Bliff's Corners?" said the man. "I calc'late you mean Starkses."

Nan started. Mrs. Stark, Margaret had told her, was the name of Mercedes Guzman. It had troubled her all the journey. She had always hated the name of Stark; and then to think of it for her own mother! She had kept trying it over. Mercedes Stark—Mercedes Guzman Stark—Mercedes Stark, *née* Guzman. She did not like it. And now here was this man

asking if she meant Starkses. Could that be the same?

"I am going to Mrs. Stark's at Bliff's Corners," said Nan. "Can you tell me how far it is?"

"Wall, it'll be fourteen mile, or maybe nigher onto fifteen, I calc'late."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nan. "I thought," she added, seeing the man looked interested, "they would have sent the carriage for me."

The man stared. "What in thunder?" he asked.

"The carriage," said Nan. She began to wonder if the roads were impassable.

"Je-*hos*aphat!" said the man, and supplemented it by whistling a bar or two of "Dixie."

Nan, indignant, turned and walked away. She was tired, and half afraid and wholly homesick. What kind of mother could Mercedes Guzman be to let her child's home-coming be like this? Tears rose to her eyes, but she would not let them fall.

"Look a' hyar," said the man, following her, "I didn't go fur to skeer you, *I* didn't. I ain't one o' your women-men with store pants an' paper collars an' gaiter boots, *I* ain't. But I've a gal o' my own out thar" (and he described with his hand a generous semicircle), "an' I'm darned if I don't do the squar' thing by any man's gal." And a great brown paw seized the bag Nan was carrying, while its owner went on to say that at the little hotel which he pointed out Nan could have a rest, a "snack," and a con-

veyance; and, further, that he would introduce her as a friend of his, and if the landlord did not "do the squar' thing by her" (which seemed to be the speaker's way of expressing the Golden Rule), he, her champion, would know the reason why. And the stranger pointed significantly to a great bowie-knife which hung from his belt.

The gesture was blood-thirsty, but the champion smiled good-naturedly at her, and Nan was reassured. The man, now that he stood upright, looked little less than a giant, but a giant not of the cannibal species. Nan wondered what her Willoughby friends would say to his dress. A pair of homespun trousers met a rough flannel shirt above, and were tucked at the knees into the largest pair of boots Nan had ever seen. An undressed leather band served as knife-belt and saved suspenders. The face seemed as brown as the hands; but, owing to the forest of tawny hair on head and face, the only features visible were the eyes and nose. A great slouched wide-awake completed the costume.

Nan had almost to run to keep up with the enormous strides. The stranger was as good as his word; better, for he took her checks and brought in her luggage on his brawny shoulders—even Carrie's great Saratoga trunk, which had been responsible *en route* for a good deal of swearing, seemed to trouble him little more than the hand-bag. Nan was astonished to see how obsequious the landlord, who was quite a

civilized person by comparison, seemed to be to the giant.

"Now that's tol'able," said the latter, smiling and rubbing his hands as he brought in the last article. "There'll be a half-hour for the snack, and a half-hour for a rest on that ar' settee; and at twelve sharp" (eying the landlord severely) "the kerridge 'll be at the door."

The landlord promised that it would.

The giant was leaving the room, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"Dunno how 'tis whar you come from," he said to Nan, smiling again, "but out our way" (here the semicircle was repeated) "the man that made out to keep a hotel would hev to make out to keep a pianny." And he glanced superciliously at the landlord.

At two sharp the "kerridge"—of a variety Nan had never seen before—was at the door. It was something between a buggy and a sulky, but without springs. One box only could go with them; the others were to follow. The driver was a boy, to whom the giant was giving a word of advice.

"There *hev* been accidents on that ar' road, Sam-u-el."

"Yes, sir," said Samuel.

"Yes, sir," repeated the giant. "You ain't nowise afeard uv hevin' a accident on this trip, air you, Sam-u-el?"

"No, sir."

"No, sir," repeated the giant. "I am mighty glad at that, Sam-u-el, on your account. The driver that hez a accident between hyar and Starkses—this trip—will never make another."

Nan started. It was a fearful threat, and the giant's hand was on the bowie-knife; but he was speaking mildly and meditatively, and seemed to be addressing the horizon.

Nan put out her hand. "Good-by," she said, cordially, "and I thank you so much for your kindness."

The brown paw seized the proffered hand, and solemnly shook it up and down in pump-handle style, while the giant smiled again. "You hev no call," he said. "I calc'late to do the squar' thing—*I* do." And suddenly opening the paw, he let Nan's arm drop as if it had fallen from the sky.

Nan felt the heat painfully, but was glad to be on the road again. For the first time almost since Margaret had announced her departure she allowed herself to think. Margaret's icy manner had not encouraged conversation, and Nan had felt the alienation far too deeply to ask many questions. To those about the Florida home she had received the curt answer that she would know when she got there; and when she falteringly expressed surprise that her mother had not written to her, Margaret observed that perhaps Captain MacDonald's wife was not so ready with her pen as he had been. Nan had shed many tears in her room at night, but in the daytime

she had driven away thought by constant going about, and, as usual, she had overcome the pain of what actually was by fancies of what she hoped would be; so that by the time she left Willoughby she had arranged three distinct futures, any one of which was sufficient to give her courage for the parting: She would come back to Willoughby and live, winning fame meantime as an authoress; or she would come back and be a nun with Mother Françoise; or her mother would turn out she all had formerly dreamed, and her Willoughby friends should visit the Guzman paradise.

As the railway journey progressed the last idea had chiefly taken possession of her. She had been counting up her mother's probable age, and that, coupled with some knowledge of her wrongs, had led her to abandon the Murillo "Madonna" and substitute a "Mater Dolorosa." Yes, the face would be pale but sweet, the dark eyes dim with the tears that had been shed. Nan had wondered if the English would be very broken; and when she looked out from the train she expected to see some one in a Spanish mantilla. The name Stark had been the only bitter drop in the cup then.

But now, what she had seen and heard had filled her with vague misgivings. The giant's kindness, she instinctively felt, had not been given as to a superior. He had simply been "doing the squar' thing by any other man's gal."

Nan began to question the driver. He knew Starkses, but not Mrs. Stark. He had rarely been in that direction before, and had not been accountable for the accidents to which the giant had referred, so he could tell her literally nothing. Thus, in alternations of hope and fear, she completed three-fourths of her journey. But when they entered on the last stage Nan's heart sank; and when at length they reached the district known as Starkses, it died within her. The boy asked her if she would mind holding the "lines" till he asked at "that ar house." Nan volunteered to go and ask herself.

Over sandy soil, baking under the tropical sun, to a poor house, so near a sluggishly oozing pestilential stream that one might sit at the door and shoot alligators at his ease, Nan took her weary way. A woman in a furniture chintz dress of outlandish color and pattern was standing in the door-way, one hand resting on her side, the other shading her eyes as she regarded Nan. As the latter approached, the person bade her good-day pleasantly. Nan returned the greeting.

"Can you tell me," said Nan, "where Mrs. Stark lives?"

"Oh," said the woman, still kindly, but without any show of feeling, "'tain't Annie MacDonald, is it?"

"Yes," said Nan, not quite sure whether or not to suggest a prefix to the name, but feeling relieved that the country had heard of her coming.

"Oh," said the woman again, now just a little flurried, "come right in and sit down; you must be tired." And, to Nan's astonishment, she shook hands before bringing forward a chair. Then going to the door, she gave a shrill "Hi!" and a wave of the hand that brought boy and "kerridge."

Nan attempted to remonstrate. "But I think I must be going on to Mrs. Stark's."

"Bless you, this is Starkses! I'm Mrs. Stark. You must be clean beat with the long ride in the cars and the buggy. I'll get supper right off."

Nan did not faint, or tear her hair, or weep. She sat dazed, scarcely understanding. She saw as in a dream the supper "got." She sat down to it with Mrs. Stark and the driver, who had meantime joined them. The cups were china—common, but evidently brought out for the occasion; there was a little silver cream-jug, empty. The meal consisted of tea without milk, fried bacon, and biscuits yellow with soda. Mrs. Stark was kindly pressing; the boy was shy. Nan made a desperate effort to be cheerful and to eat, telling herself over and over again that she need not stay. But the tears so long kept back would come at last. She left the table, went out at the back door, and seating herself on a stool outside, face to face with the muddy stream, burst into a passion of weeping.

"*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered thee, O Zion.*"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Unlike as Mrs. Stark was to the Mercedes Guzman of Nan's dream, there was nothing vulgar about her. She had the look of one who had borne much —not heroically, but patiently, as a dumb animal might have borne it. If she had fallen from high estate, she bore no traces of her former condition; thousands of poor, hard-working people are not vulgar. Nor had she the slightest resemblance to the Spaniard of Nan's dreams, being rather fair than dark, and with almost a hectic color in her cheeks. Her figure was rather tall and slender, but bent. In age she might be a year or two past forty.

The house consisted of one large room, with two smaller ones partitioned off, and a little shed that held the cooking-stove. The best of the two smaller rooms was given to Nan. Like the sitting-room, it had a homespun carpet and rough board walls covered with a cheap paper. There was a bed that, like the silver cream-jug, seemed a relic, a pine table with a dressing-glass, and a large chest with a cover of the same awful chintz Mrs. Stark wore; a painted washstand, with coarse white basin and ewer, and a large

piece of kitchen soap in a saucer; no wardrobe, or chest of drawers, or press. It was more luxurious than the nun's cell Nan had thought of occupying, and it was a palace compared with many a place where saints have voluntarily spent long lives. But Nan did not stop to think of that. She compared it with her room at Preston Place, and loathed it.

By the time the driver had left, and Mrs. Stark was free to attend to her again, Nan's spirits had somewhat revived. Youth is slow to believe a situation hopeless, and Nan had already persuaded herself that hers was not. So she brightened up, and began to speak of her coming as just a visit, and was quite cheered when she discovered that Mrs. Stark regarded it in the same light. Margaret, she decided, had only wished to frighten her, and was not so bad as she had seemed.

She was chatting away quite pleasantly when a step was heard. "There's Jim," said Mrs. Stark. Nan looked up, expecting to see man or boy, and was surprised when a tall, stout, sheepish-looking girl entered. "Come on, Jim," Mrs. Stark said, encouragingly; "this is Annie MacDonald." Nan saw she was expected to shake hands, and did so, without in the least knowing who Jim was. This ceremony over, Jim handed Mrs. Stark some money, and in reply to a question said that the "pants" had given satisfaction. Then Nan, pleading weariness, retired to her room, her mother going in with her to light

the solitary tallow-candle that made everything look doubly dismal. Mrs. Stark shook hands with her, and hoped she would sleep well, and Nan, moved by an impulse more of pity than affection, kissed her. Mrs. Stark received the kiss kindly, but without the slightest emotion.

In the course of next day's conversation Nan learned something about her mother's past and present. Mrs. Stark evidently had nothing to conceal. Her life with the departed Stark (Margaret had not even told Nan that he was departed) had been the common, uneventful life of most of her class. Jim, or Jemima, was her daughter by the second marriage, and consequently Nan's half-sister. Jemima Stark! Nan could remember how she and Tory—discussing names for their children, as they were fond of doing—had placed Jemima at the very head of their *Index Expurgatorius*. What would Tory say now? Mrs. Stark and Jim lived alone on the few acres Stark had left them, supporting themselves by sewing. Nan had noticed a sewing-machine and a great pile of homespun, and this explained it. Her mother was a tailoress!

It is wonderful how quietly we can accept facts when we know them to be facts. For herself Nan at once got rid of her uneasiness by fixing a fortnight as the limit of her stay. The problem that puzzled her most was, how a selfish, mercenary man, to whom worldly position had been the very breath

of his nostrils, had ever married the person before her.

She took courage at last to ask about her father. Mrs. Stark spoke of him without hesitation and without bitterness. The Guzmans were Spanish, but the migration to Florida had been in her grandfather's time; even her father had been born in America. She related frankly the history of the land. Her grandfather, a man of means—who had been "somebody" in his own country, she believed—had bought an immense tract, but some defect in the title had led to a long lawsuit, decided at first in their favor. It was at this time of brief prosperity that Captain MacDonald, travelling with a brother-officer, had met and married her. Almost immediately after the marriage the decision had been reversed on appeal, and the Guzmans were penniless, though most people thought unjustly so. "Then," said Mrs. Stark, quietly, referring to the gallant captain, and passing over for his daughter's sake some incidents that had preceded his going—"then he went." The air of passive, uncomplaining endurance impressed Nan more strongly than before.

Between Mrs. Stark and Jim it was evident that a deep though undemonstrative affection existed. Jim was as strong as a horse, and as ungainly and good-natured as a large puppy. Nan imagined, from her appearance, that she must be very near her own age, but found she was only sixteen. Jim conceived for

her new sister an intense admiration, and became at once her willing slave. Both mother and daughter treated Nan not as a member of the family, but as a guest for whom they must do everything possible. How many sacrifices they made in providing even the indifferent comfort she found with them, Nan was long in finding out.

The guest spent the greater part of her first day in writing letters, and she became excitedly eager to receive replies. The village of Bliff's Corners was four miles away, and Jim trudged joyfully the eight miles daily till she was rewarded by finding a foreign letter which had been forwarded from Willoughby. Nan was delighted to hear from Tory, but could not account for Margaret's silence.

It is not Tory's history I am chronicling, but poor Nan's; but inasmuch as I have referred to certain little faults in the former, it is but just to say that these had long ago disappeared, and that Tory was now not only the beauty of Strathlowrie, but was declared by everybody who knew her "as guid as she was bonnie," and "her mither's verra sel' come back again." Young as she was, she could set a dozen offers against Nan's two; and in finally settling the matter she had certainly set aside any promptings of ambition, and let true love choose for her. The young minister had not been the lucky man after all, however. The winner of the prize was no other than our old friend, Archie Campbell,

now admitted with Colin to a share in his father's business; and as there was no reason for delay, the marriage was to take place on Tory's eighteenth birthday. To knit still more strongly the tie between the Leslies and the Campbells, Sophy had just sailed for India to marry Rob.

This important news was duly made known to Nan in the letter brought by Jim. Of course when it was written they had not known at the Manse of Nan's change of plans, so that Tory was anticipating her coming in all her glory. "I don't know what Mr. Preston," she wrote, "will think of our poor little Manse. But as papa always says, we cannot do more than give our best and a hearty welcome." Oh, if Nan could only fly to Tory that very moment! She began to wonder if it had been worth while to make such a sacrifice.

She wondered more as the days passed on and no letter came from Margaret. She received a long, beautiful letter from Mother Françoise, and a long, rambling one from Mrs. Benjamin. The latter, who had been like all the St. Mark's people, greatly taken with Mr. Eustace during his short stay in Willoughby, was canvassing among the congregation to get Mr. Tolivar elected assistant bishop, so as to have Mr. Eustace as rector. Mrs. Benjamin reasoned thus: "Mr. Tolivar will never go without something better than Willoughby; no other congregation will ever call him; and as bishop he will only be able to inflict

a small portion of himself on each of us." Sound reasonings! And yet Dr. Preston had said, "Who can find a logical woman?"

The fortnight fixed by Nan as the limit of her stay passed away, and yet there was no letter from Margaret; nor, though Nan had replied to the two Willoughby letters at once, did either Mother Françoise or Mrs. Benjamin write again. Mrs. Stark was sure the post-office was responsible, and related various losses of which she happened to know. But Nan grew more and more uneasy. She did not know what had happened, but she had a vague apprehension of coming misfortune.

The blow fell at last—in the form of a letter from Mr. O'Neil, who explained that he wrote at the request of his wife, she being too deeply shocked to write herself. The Baltimore people had sent in their accounts, and had returned the I O U, demanding their money. Mr. O'Neil had refused to pay, being, as he said, neither legally nor morally bound to deprive his wife of the necessaries of life in order to minister to the extravagance and want of principle of an ungrateful girl. The conclusion of the whole matter was, that they washed their hands of her, and had written a full account of her doings to the Manse. A postscript added that the affair had leaked out, so that all Willoughby knew she had left in disgrace. Mr. O'Neil suggested that she should proceed forthwith to make herself useful to her mother.

When Nan was able to think, she knew full well whose the inspiration had been, and that Mr. O'Neil's share in the letter had only been the copying of it. But the blow was terrible. That Margaret should not think well of her was but a secondary consideration; she did not think well of Margaret; and Mr. O'Neil's opinions were copied, like his sermons and letters, from his wife's. But "all Willoughby knew she had left in disgrace"—Mother Françoise in her convent, Mrs. Benjamin in her canvassing (Nan could hear the latter giving her version of the affair, and the young Benjamins constantly interrupting her with their "*What, ma's?*"), and all the Fitzhughs in the pleasant places where she had laughed and danced and dreamed. And then those people in Baltimore—Mr. O'Neil had vaguely hinted they might "take stern measures." What did this mean? Would they put her in prison? She was not sure that even that would be worse than the fate Margaret had marked out for her—to begin forthwith to help her mother. Did they, could they, know her mother's position? Not long ago they dwelt much on her thorough education, and lauded her abilities; and now they proposed she should be a tailoress!—for that was what helping her mother would mean. Nan wandered out to think it over, but found nothing in nature to give courage or inspiration. The sky glared fiercely down upon her, the parched earth looked up to her, the slimy yellow stream stared her in the face. She

fled from it all, and taking refuge in her little room, asked that she might die. Disgrace behind her, a sordid life of labor before her, death seemed a thousand times better than life. She cried aloud, as Irene had done in her hour of need, "Lawrence! Lawrence!" but to her, less fortunate than Irene, no answer came.

She told her mother, when at last she emerged with swollen eyes and tear-stained face from her little room, that Margaret had quarrelled with her; and Mrs. Stark and Jim sympathized with her, and were indignant at Mrs. O'Neil. Then there was a little whispering between mother and daughter, resulting in Jim's trudging off with a pile of work and coming home radiant, three hours after, with some delicacies —the like of which had never been seen within the little house before. The good, kind, simple pair prepared a meal that seemed to them luxurious; and entreating Nan to cheer up, they sweetened their own coarse fare—for nothing could induce them to partake of hers—by watching her eat. Nan ate, but even while doing so wept the more. To profit by their kindness when she was counting the moments till she could turn her back upon them was unendurable; yet that was what she was doing.

And now began for her a weary time. Of course she planned; and if she had only steadily kept to any one of the plans something might have come of it. Mrs. Stark, seeing her restlessness and unhappi-

ness, took a step that surprised Nan when she knew it. She wrote to Mrs. O'Neil asking what Nan had done to deserve such neglect. The reply came in Mr. O'Neil's name, and it fully set forth Nan's delinquencies, only omitting the chief one—that she had not married Dr. Preston.

Nan was indignant, but also a little awed, when Mrs. Stark showed her the letter, and expressed the opinion that the O'Neils had reason to be angry. She did not claim the right to censure, but with a dignity of which Nan had not supposed her capable, she declared wilful debt just another name for dishonesty. But Jim, for the first time in her life, turned against her mother. She was sure Nan had done nothing wrong, and she hated the O'Neils. Mrs. Stark said no more, but she remembered how some trustful people had believed in Captain MacDonald to the last. Had Nan only told the whole story at first it would have been implicitly believed; but having set out by deceiving, as her father had done before her, she was doubted even when she spoke the truth.

The weeks rolled on, and Nan had no more prospect of getting away than she had in the beginning. Long fits of weeping, and longer fits of utter hopelessness, alternated with fitful gleams of cheerfulness. Mother and daughter did not relax in their kindness. If Mrs. Stark's manner was a little colder after the disclosure, it soon became as before; while Jim

would lay down at any moment the work on which their daily bread depended to run for Nan's hat or book, or to button her boots. Nan was not absolutely idle, but the fitful industry did no one any good. She sent verses several times to the country paper, and Mrs. Stark and Jim could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw them in print. She made pretty trifles, and presented them graciously to her entertainers. She sketched a little and painted a little, and her adoring Jim sat up at night to earn money for some cheap frames. Occasionally a neighbor—that is, some one living a mile or more away—would come and "stop supper." One or two were of Mrs. Stark's class, one or two others a good deal above it, as far as wealth was concerned; not one of them was so naturally refined. They all treated Nan with the greatest deference, and pressed upon her invitations to "spend the day." Sometimes rough men called with orders for "Mis' Stark," who seemed to be a favorite with everybody. Nan could not bear to see any of them—men or women. She would leave the room and the house and sit outside, straining her eyes in every direction in a vague hope that help would be coming. She had written long letters to her uncle and Tory, giving her side of the story, and begging her uncle's forgiveness; and she entreated to be allowed to go back to Scotland, and in earnest work live down her utter failure and her great unhappiness. But it never once came into her head to

do the slightest little services for herself, much less for Mrs. Stark and Jim.

The Feast of All Saints—a bitter anniversary now to Nan—had come and gone, and still there was no letter. November and December passed, and Nan's punishment seemed greater than she could bear. The poor little efforts at making Christmas cheer were worse to her than if the day had been allowed to pass without mention. The presents that Mrs. Stark and Jim had made such sacrifices to buy were such as Nan would not have thought of giving Phyllis. Their kindness cut her to the heart. She wanted to be away from the sordid life, and almost equally she wanted to be away from the pain of seeing their sacrifices lavished on one who was determined not to return their affection. Sometimes her old happy nature would flash out, and for an hour or two she would keep her mother and sister amused and delighted. Sometimes she was moody and ungracious; always she went about with a load at her heart; and if by chance she kept it off during the day, she was sure to wake up with a start to find that it had settled down upon her in the darkness. Then the pain at her heart seemed to mount into her head, until she could no longer see clearly. The beautiful fancies that she had once called to her at pleasure came no more. And thus the winter passed away.

Nan did not know much about illness, but she felt

that if her life went on as it was doing she would die in good earnest. She proposed to Mrs. Stark that she should go to Bliff's Corners and try to get pupils. Mrs. Stark was not unwilling; not that she wished to get rid of her, but that she thought it would be better for Nan herself. An itinerant preacher who knew Mrs. Stark recommended "Sister Pearson" as a "woman of God" and a taker of boarders at small cost, and offered to call and arrange matters with them. And these preliminaries being settled, Nan set off, bag and baggage, in an ox-cart, getting out and walking as she neared the village. Bliff's Corners seemed a great improvement on the solitary little house by the alligator stream. It had a passable hotel, where visitors from the North often stayed *en route;* so that it seemed to Nan in the line of escape, if not escape itself. As things turned out, however, it was escape. On the second day of her stay in it she was passing the hotel just as the omnibus had put down the new arrivals from the South. A lady was giving some directions to a porter. Nan started as she saw her, for though her back was turned, something about the figure struck her as strangely familiar. The lady turned and saw Nan, then uttered a little scream of astonishment. "It cannot be our Jacobite!" she said, as she came quickly forward with the smile Nan remembered so well, and stretched out both her hands.

Nan tried to smile in return, but Irene and the

other passengers seemed whirling round with horses and omnibus and all Bliff's Corners. Then she felt an utter giving way of every sense and power, and thought it must be death; and then for the time being she knew no more.

CHAPTER XXX.

The grandest thing about the house at which Mrs. Le Moine and her friends had arrived was the name. It might have been the *Alligator Arms*, or the *Crocodile Inn;* it was the *Hotel Continental.* The travellers had laughed when they saw the imposing sign on the little house. But when Nan, recovering from her faint, found herself on a sofa in the best bedroom, the lovely face of Irene looking anxiously into hers, she would not have thought it out of place if it had been called the *Hotel Paradise.*

"Now," said Irene, when satisfied that Nan was really better, "from what part of the earth have you come? or have you fallen from heaven?"

"It is you who have fallen from heaven," said Nan, wistfully. Oh! was it not heaven to be once more with a bit of the old life, with all its dainty ways and sweet refinement? Nan had been in the height of her brief prosperity when last she saw this beautiful and gracious woman, yet she had in a moment wished to lay her heart at her feet. What must she feel now when, like an angel of deliverance, she had suddenly appeared before her, making

the long, sad months of her exile but as a bad dream? Nan used to be so sick of the odor of homespun; here was the faint breath of violets which Lawrence had told her always lingered about Irene. Surely God must have put it in her heart, she thought, to arrive at Bliff's Corners just as Irene was coming. Suppose she had still been at "Starkses" and missed her! Suppose she had not been passing at that very moment! She remembered Miss Macalaster's "Evangeline," and said with all her soul a little thanksgiving.

Yet scarcely were the words said when she proceeded to manufacture fresh troubles for herself. They spoke of Carrie first, and both were overcome. And then Irene told that she had sold her estate, and that a school or asylum for the children of negro soldiers was to be built on it. After the burning of the mansion she had not cared to retain the place, and she should never live in her native State again; but surely, she said, it must be Nemesis herself who had presided at the sale, and handed over the estate of the Hamiltons to the negroes. The sum paid, however, had been considerable, and, added to a little bequest lately received, was quite sufficient to render teaching no longer necessary.

"And now," said Irene, as she finished, "will you tell me your story?"

Nan told her story, but with such reservations that it did not seem at all the story I have been telling

the reader. Margaret had quarrelled with her, she said, after Carrie's death and Lawrence's leaving, and to punish her for having mismanaged her money-matters, had sent her off to Florida to some relations she had never before seen; and Nan had found it impossible to stay, and had got so far on the way back again. Nan did not say that the relations had ill-treated her; but as she gave no other cause for leaving them, she left it to be understood that they had.

Oh, Nan, Nan! And Mrs. Stark and Jim are at the very same moment sewing away as if for dear life, and talking of the little basket of good things the money will buy for you. And even, long hours after, when Jim declares her mother "played out," and forces her to go to bed, she still sits stitching away for love of you; and when at last she lays the homespun down, she takes out, just before she goes to bed, the old newspapers that are her greatest treasure, and reads your verses over, her plain face all beautified with love; and in her simple prayer she mentions your name; and when at last she lies down beside her mother, she says, "I do hope her bed's soft." Dear, honest Jim! her own bed was not very soft; but in her sweet humility and unselfishness she never thought of soft things being for her.

Irene listened to Nan's story with great indignation against Margaret. In the six weeks Carrie had spent with her before her death the friends had often

spoken of Nan. Carrie had told all the simple story of the Manse as Nan had told it to her, and had declared that she quite agreed with the minister as to Margaret being a changeling; so that Irene was prepared not only to love Nan—as she had said in Baltimore—but to dislike Margaret. So she embraced and soothed Nan, and advised her to have nothing more to do with Mrs. O'Neil. "Why don't you go back to your uncle, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, if I only could!" said Nan. It was what she had set her heart upon doing. She knew from the silence he must be angry at her, but she was sure that if she could once reach him he was too just to deny her a hearing—and then there would be Tory to intercede.

"Listen to me," said Irene, kindly. "In three days I leave this for New York, on my way to England. Now could you have a better chance of company?"

"I could not have a chance of better company," said Nan, amending it. How pleasant it was to fall into the old courteous ways! She had not troubled herself to say courteous things to Mrs. Stark and Jim.

"Ah," said Irene, "what a lover you would have made! Do you remember the white roses? They are in one of my trunks at this moment. I have kept them for the sake of your Lost Cause and mine."

Nan was flattered indeed.

"Now," said Irene, "I know no roundabout ways, so I am coming to the point with you as directly as I would with dear Carrie. You cannot have money for such a journey at a moment's notice. Let me be your banker for Carrie's sake; and when you get safely to your uncle you shall repay me."

Would that Nan had known no roundabout ways! Had she only told the true story, to begin with, her difficulties would have been virtually at an end. With a foolish girl's weak judgment she had fancied that to do so would alienate the proud South Carolinian forever; whereas, if she had searched the whole world over, she could not have found a human being whom she might more safely trust. Irene was no democrat. She would have thought the position of the newly found mother a misfortune—a great misfortune—but she would have decided at once that as Nan had been brought up amid entirely different surroundings, ignorant even of her mother's existence, and as the mother had another daughter, and was therefore entirely independent of Nan, it would be happier for both that they should live apart. She was strongly prejudiced in favor of good birth, but she would have acknowledged that Nan was as refined as though the Guzmans had really been Spanish grandees; and she would have thought it a cruel and a shameful thing to send Nan off, as Margaret had done, utterly unprepared for what she was to meet. And so, instead of scorning her, as Nan had

feared, she would have been her truest friend and champion. But Nan had chosen what she thought the easy rather than the right way. She had not yet learned that the right way is always the easiest—in the end.

She decided in the same way about the money. She had long ago come to the conclusion that Lawrence knew of her disgrace, and that he, too, had forsaken her, and would no longer think of carrying out his sister's intentions. And then suppose her uncle should decline to refund the money? If he refused to forgive her, it was not probable he would be willing to pay for her coming back. But Nan resolutely put the *ifs* away. She could always, she decided, fall back upon her writing. She had read of the sums George Eliot received, and at once decided that one novel (which she would proceed to write at once) would, if other sources failed, more than cover all expenses.

And so Nan, with many expressions of gratitude, accepted the generous proposal. And Irene, pitying the pale face, so sadly changed since first she saw it, added to her kindness by going with Miss Brown, her travelling companion, to "Sister Pearson's" for the three days, as there was not a disengaged room at the *Hotel Continental* for Nan.

Not till Nan was going to bed did she have time to think of Mrs. Stark and Jim. Nan had promised to go and see them on the very day it was now settled

she was to leave for the North. She would not write, she decided, till just before she left.

So just about the time Jim, full of pride and affection, was reading her verses, Nan was thinking of Jim and her mother. And what she was thinking was, "Well, thank God, that is over."

CHAPTER XXXI.

In the little house by the muddy stream there was such excitement as had probably never been before. The two good creatures were planning a pleasant surprise. Mrs. Stark was going to Bliff's Corners to see her daughter.

Not that either of them deemed that seeing Mrs. Stark would be the pleasure. They were far too humble for that, though far too simple also to take into consideration that it might be quite the reverse. By dint of working early and late they had got together a little sum to be expended on Nan's behalf, and Mrs. Stark was going to the village to fill and present a basket. They were but poor cooks; but between them they had concocted a cake, so as to take "something from home." The initiated, putting together its small size and great weight, would not have augured well of its digestible properties; but Mrs. Stark and Jim were, happily, ignorant of specific gravity, and when they had plastered it over with a thick coat of indifferent "icing" they were more than pleased. "My!" said Jim, "ain't this high jinks?"

The cake achieved, the next business was to make Mrs. Stark's appearance in some degree worthy of Nan; so another dress-pattern was cut from the terrible chintz (the whole piece had been bought from a pedler at a nominal cost), and Mrs. Stark cut and basted, and Jim "ran" the machine. So it came to pass that the day before that settled for Nan's leaving for the North her mother set out to see her. Jim walked part of the way, and sent a thousand messages and one request—would Nan let her know if she wrote any more "pieces?"

Jim went back to the little house to make up by doubly hard work for the mother's holiday, and Mrs. Stark walked on alone. The heat was trying; the ground barren and burning; the "filled" shawl, which Jim had insisted on her wearing to make a better impression, exhausting; the ridiculous little cotton parasol insufficient for shade; the traveller not very strong. What of that? The patient woman took the weary way, as she had taken the longer and wearier way of life, as a matter of course, and achieved it step by step.

After all, she was surprised when it was so soon over. For the past few days she had been in a strange flutter of excitement, and this morning she was going over the story of twenty-one years before.

With the humility natural to her, she had said as little of herself as possible in the short sketch she had given of Captain MacDonald's relations with

her. In the better days of the Guzmans she had been sent to a boarding-school in St. Augustine, so that at the time Captain MacDonald met her she was by no means a barbarian. But little the captain cared what she was. With the land, he would have married her had she been a Hottentot; without it, he would have left her had she been Venus and Minerva combined. When her baby was born she had loved it; when it was taken from her she had mourned it; and when she was told it was dead, she had wept for it—as all good mothers love and mourn and weep. But that seemed to her such ages ago! Since then she had lived her life of obscurity, of poverty, and toil; trying to do her duty to God and man; loving, in her undemonstrative way, her second husband and her second child. When she first heard of Nan's existence, she could not believe it; when Mrs. O'Neil gave her indubitable proof, she was more pained than pleased; when she heard of Nan's coming, she bore it as she had borne everything else. What could the daughter of Captain MacDonald, brought up among her father's race, have in common with the mother whom he had brutally ill-treated and abandoned? Why should they disturb her quiet by seeking to associate her with events almost forgotten? The wife, the mother of long ago, was dead; she could not live again.

But Nan had the power of making friends at will, or even without willing; and so, when she left the

little house, the two who remained were not as they had been. Each no longer sufficed for the other. First the mother, and then the daughter, would lay down the homespun and slip into the little room that had been Nan's, or go to the door and look towards Bliff's Corners, dimly hoping she might find it "lonesome" and come back. God pity them! They will wait long, long for that.

Then Jim originated the idea of the surprise-basket; and with such an object they found it easy to keep steadily at work, only they moved the sewing-machine to the other window, so that without wasting time they could see any one coming.

And now Mrs. Stark, hot and tired, but eager, is bearing the heavy basket to Sister Pearson's. It is no longer Annie MacDonald she is going to see. The mother's heart has risen from the dead, as it seemed to her. She is going to meet *her child.*

Nan was sitting at the window of Irene's room, chatting away most cheerily, when she saw a strange-looking figure coming down the street. She was just about to call her friend's attention to the "guy," when something about it struck her as familiar. Nan looked, and could not believe her eyes; looked again, and knew the dress—red cabbage-roses on a sickly-green ground. It was Mrs. Stark!

Nan flew down-stairs. "Sister Pearson" did not keep a servant, and at that time of day was always engaged in her kitchen. The front door opened di-

rectly into the little parlor. Nan carefully closed the doors leading to the back of the house and opened the porch door.

Mrs. Stark saw her, and her face was transfigured. Not that she meant to be demonstrative in spite of the newly awakened love. She knew the difference, she had kept saying over and over to herself. She only wanted that the princess should stretch out her sceptre and touch the poor woman's offering; but the light went out of her eyes when she saw the princess's irresponsive face.

"Good-morning," said Nan, coldly.

Two bright spots began to burn in the thin cheeks. Mrs. Stark was faint with the walk, and the shopping, and the load. Nan saw it all, but even while she was pitiful was ruthless.

Mrs. Stark held out her basket. It was some little things, she said, that she and Jim had got for her. Nan explained hastily that she had met an old friend, an intimate friend of the Prestons, with whom she was going away to Scotland, to her uncle Leslie. She rather let it be understood that the lady had come on purpose for her.

The bright spots faded, and the face grew very white. But the basket was again offered. There was a cake, Mrs. Stark said, made every bit by themselves. Nan declined it nervously, saying she would not know what to do with it, now that she was with her friends.

A little silence. "Then I suppose we won't see you again?"

Nan said she supposed not; there was not time; but she would write.

"Well, good-by," said Mrs. Stark, trying to smile.

"Good-by," said Nan. They shook hands.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Stark, turning again as she was going, and speaking with a great effort, "would you mind sending a word to Jim?"

"Oh, to be sure," said Nan; "give her my love, and tell her I will write. Good-by."

When the door had closed, the weary woman, whiter than before, set down her basket for a moment, and leaning against the porch pressed her hand to her heart. Then with a great patience she took up her load again, and trudging back the four long miles, entered the little house just as busy Jim was saying to herself, "She'll be hevin' a cup o' good tea."

"Oh, mother, what is it?" cried the girl, as she saw Mrs. Stark's face. "Is she ill? Is she dead?"

"No, Jim, no. She's well. But we'll never see her again. She's going away with some of her grand friends, and she wouldn't take the basket. She's Captain MacDonald's daughter, after all."

That was the only reproach ever spoken by Mrs. Stark—of Nan, at least. Poor Jim understood. She prepared in silence the much-needed cup of tea; and then, the homespun neglected for once, the two sat hand-in-hand, and cried quietly.

But when Jim had wept herself to sleep that night Mrs. Stark, wakeful, notwithstanding her weariness, rose from beside her, and out of the fulness of her heart indited a letter to Mrs. O'Neil. She spoke not a word against Nan for leaving her, but she blamed Mrs. O'Neil for sending her when she must have known she could not be happy with them. "It was cruel to her," wrote the poor woman, "and cruel—cruel to Jim and me."

And after that it was as if there had been a death in the little house; only we speak of the dead, while Mrs. Stark and Jim never spoke of Nan.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IRENE's friend, Miss Brown, was one of that large class of American single ladies who travel to improve their minds. You will know them anywhere by their linen portfolios and Russia-leather note-books and diaries; and you will observe that the moment they see a new sight or hear a new fact, they note it down.

Miss Brown was always writing letters or taking notes, so that Nan had Irene almost to herself. The beautiful Southerner excited much attention and remark. Fabulous tales were told of her former glory, and the report generally received was that she was going abroad to "marry a title." Many on board, learning that her first year of widowhood was over, were disposed to enter the lists with the unknown "title;" but Irene's reserve, and very apparent wish for seclusion, left no opening for anything beyond finding her deck-chair and arranging her cushions and rug. Nan was jealous if any one but herself did even that.

She was glad now she had made the sacrifice—for Lawrence's sake and for Irene's. The two would

meet, of course; all would be right at last; and it would be a consolation to know of their happiness, even if she never saw them again.

And yet Nan almost wished the voyage might last forever. Irene cared for her — as Carrie and Mother Françoise and Mrs. Hotspur and others had cared for her. But Nan rejoiced in trembling. For Irene to meet Lawrence would be for her to learn the story of Nan's disgrace; and very deep disgrace Lawrence must think it, since he would not even write. And what would become of Nan then, forsaken by them both?

It was natural that Irene should not speak of Lawrence, but she thought it strange that Nan never mentioned him. She knew nothing of the engagement—when Carrie went to her it had not been settled—and she naturally concluded that Nan must have heard her story, and was silent on her account.

But when they arrived in England Nan had a more pressing uneasiness than even that about Lawrence. She had written to the Manse before sailing, telling them of her coming, and asking them to write to the hotel in Liverpool. So far there was not a word; and after Irene had twice postponed her journey to London on her account, Nan insisted on going without hearing. So on a certain day she telegraphed again, asking them to send a reply to the station at Oban, where she would have to change trains, and she was to leave early next morning.

Dinner was over at the hotel, and Nan was in her room putting the finishing touches to her boxes, when Irene came to the door and called out Miss Brown, who was helping her. Nan could hear a long conversation in the next room; then Irene appeared, but transformed. Her face was pale, her eyes glowing, her manner icy.

"I wish to speak to you a moment," she said. "I must explain that before I left Florida I wrote to Mrs. O'Neil. Heaven knows I was prompted neither by doubt nor curiosity, but simply wished to express my opinion of the way she had treated one brought up in her father's house, and very dear to my dead friend. Her reply has just been forwarded."

The moment Irene mentioned Mrs. O'Neil Nan's heart sank; but even then she little knew what was coming.

"Do you know this writing?" asked Irene, handing her a sheet of cheap paper covered with ill-spelled, ill-written words. Nan could truthfully say she did not.

Irene evidently did not believe her. "Perhaps you will recognize the signature," she said, coldly.

Nan looked mechanically at the end, and saw "*M. Stark.*" She did not move a muscle. The most self-indulgent of us can receive the death-blow in silence.

"Is the writer your mother?" asked Irene.

"Yes."

"Was it your mother who came to the boarding-house that day?"

Nan was silent.

"I must insist on an answer."

"Yes."

Irene turned and left her.

Nan stood as if turned to stone. A maid came in by-and-by with hot water, and said the "lady" had sent her to help her; so she had to make a pretence of busying herself, though she declined all assistance. The lady had also sent word that her breakfast would be brought in at seven, and she would be ready to go with her to the train. Nan finished her packing and then sat down.

She sat there and listened to the great clock striking hour after hour. She was there when they knocked at her door to wake her, she was there when they came with her breakfast. She went through the form of eating, then rose and put on her cloak and hat. "Lor', miss," cried the maid, as she took the cloak off the bed, "you've never been and sat up the whole night!" Nan never answered.

Miss Brown came for her presently, saw to her lunch-basket and her ticket, and was quite kind and friendly. Nan said "Yes" to all her directions, and when Miss Brown said "Good-by" she said "Good-by." But she looked like a ghost, and spoke and moved as if in a dream; so that Miss Brown went back and told Irene she was quite uneasy about her.

Nan reached the station where the Strathlowrie branch diverges from the main line in the same dazed state, and found she had an hour and a half to wait. When she asked if there was a telegram the man looked curiously at her, she thought, as he handed it to her; so that she would not open it at once, but took it to the waiting-room. How sweet even the sternest reproof would be now! Anything, anything rather than turning away from her in contempt. And how glad she would be to get to bed! Her head and limbs were aching, and her hands burning. She hoped she was not going to be ill, and give them trouble. Then she opened the telegram and read,

"*There is no home for you here.*

"ROBERT LESLIE."

Nan received this final blow with the same dull despair with which she had seen Irene desert her. Mechanically she went over all that had befallen her step by step: Carrie's death (what a little while it was since she had dreaded the grave, and now it seemed to her so safe and quiet!)—Margaret's anger—her exile to Florida—all Willoughby hearing of her disgrace—Lawrence's silence—Irene's contempt. The Manse had been her forlorn hope, and now it was closed against her. She was forsaken of God and of man.

Poor, poor Nan! The world is said to take us at our own valuation; but sometimes the case is re-

versed, and individuals learn to take themselves at the world's valuation. It was so with Nan now. She thought people regarded her strangely; so they did, because she looked so ill. But she imagined they saw something criminal about her. She had once seen a woman who had stolen a duck led off to prison, and the woman's face had haunted her. She wondered if hers had the same look.

Well, there was nothing left for her but to die. That was what she said over and over to herself with growing conviction. Not that she thought for a moment of anything so wicked as taking her own life. In spite of all her faults, she still feared God and regarded man. She only felt that she could not live. She had her ticket for Strathlowrie; she would like to die there. It would be night when they reached it; and under cover of the darkness she would creep into the town and pass the Manse, and perhaps get a last glimpse of her uncle and Tory.

She opened her hand-bag, took out paper and pencil, and employed the time of waiting in writing a letter. She wanted one person in the world to know just what she had really done. She felt that she was getting too confused to judge of it; but she knew the facts, and for this once, at least, she would write them—without exaggeration and without extenuation, and she enclosed her uncle's telegram.

She was about to enclose also her mother's letter,

when it occurred to her to read it. She had thought, from what Irene said, that Mrs. Stark must have told of what had occurred at "Sister Pearson's," and she had not resented it; it had seemed to her only just. But when she read the poor scrawl, and comprehended that her mother had never thought of blaming her—had never even told the story of how she had turned her from the door, but had reproached Margaret only with the useless pain she had inflicted on them all—then the fountains of the great deep of her nature were broken up, and she wept bitterly. She would not part with the letter, but she added a line to her own: "If ever you can think kindly of me again, try and do something for my mother and Jim."

She addressed the letter to Lawrence at his London banker's, posted it, and took her seat in the train for Strathlowrie.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IRENE went to London, and Mrs. Hotspur Fitzhugh met her at the train. They were old friends and correspondents, and had been eagerly looking forward to the meeting.

"And what have you done with Nan?" asked Mrs. Hotspur, when they had reached their hotel. "I should like much to see her again."

Irene's face grew stern, but she hesitated to tell what she considered the shameful story. She could not pretend, however, that there was nothing to tell, and she would not be guilty of vague innuendo—besides, Mrs. Hotspur was a mutual friend—so she told what had occurred.

Mrs. Hotspur looked grave. "Are you sure, dear, you have not misjudged her?"

"How could I?" I know what she told me about the distant relatives, and Miss Brown overheard the conversation with her mother, thinking she was one of them."

"I don't approve of overhearing conversations, Irene."

"Nor I, Constance. But you know how absent-minded Miss Brown is, and the whole thing was

over in a minute. Her room was close to the porch, and the window was open. She saw the poor thing coming, and it is more than probable she took out her note-book to describe her. She mentioned it to me, after wondering if Nan could be related to such a person; and the moment I got Mrs. O'Neil's letter it flashed upon me who the woman was—the more readily that Nan had never mentioned to me that she had seen any one—so I made Miss Brown go over the story again. She could not see them from where she sat, but she said the voice was pathetic and not unrefined. But to think Carrie should have believed all that "Mercedes Guzman" story! I felt doubly angry for Carrie's sake."

"I don't doubt, dear, that you have acted for the best; but it would be terrible to be unjustly harsh with such a nature. Lawrence was so relieved to hear of her being with you."

"Lawrence!" cried Irene. "Is he in London?"

"He only arrived to-day, and he is anxiously waiting to see you—to hear of Nan, of course," added Mrs. Hotspur, with a smile.

"To hear of Nan!" echoed Irene, indignantly. "You go on as if she had done nothing. How is it possible I am to answer his questions without expressing my opinion?"

"Well, will you do me a favor, dear?"

"Certainly, if I can. But you know, Constance, that I cannot say one thing and mean another."

"I think," said Mrs. Hotspur, "you should know me better than to imagine I would ask it. I simply beg you to say nothing of all you have told me till Lawrence hears from Nan or her friends."

"But suppose he does not hear?"

"Then it would be useless to say anything. But of course he will hear—if not from her, from her friends. He considers her a sacred trust for Carrie's sake."

Irene gave the promise.

Lawrence dined with them, and seemed, indeed, greatly interested in Nan. Far from forgetting her, or forsaking her, he had written again and again, and had at last asked Colonel Fitzhugh to find out if his letters had been duly forwarded. The colonel, on inquiring at the post-office, was told that they had been; but the official never thought of explaining that by Mrs. O'Neil's orders all letters for Nan, as well as for her husband and herself, were sent to Halifax. And so Lawrence settled in his own mind that in the pleasure of her new home Nan had not quite forgotten him, perhaps, but had not felt interested enough to write. He was disappointed in her.

Of Carrie's wishes in regard to her money, and carrying them into effect, he had not said a word to Mrs. O'Neil; else, we may be sure, Nan would have gone north instead of south, and my tale might have had a different ending. But, as the reader may imagine, Lawrence's thoughts were not all of Nan. They spoke of Carrie, and of the night of the fire

(Lawrence could bear to speak of it now), and Lawrence told the dream from which he had had such rude awaking.

"Oh! by-the-bye," said Irene, "I have something belonging to you. When the negro asylum people took possession of all that was left of Beauvoir they found this. It must have fallen out of your pocket that night." Irene handed Lawrence a note addressed to him, but did not say how often she had wondered what lady had written it.

"Nan's note!" exclaimed Lawrence, with sudden recollection. He had positively never thought of it from the night at Beauvoir till Irene put it into his hand.

"Nan again!" thought Irene, impatiently, never guessing how things had been with them once; "it seems to me everything is Nan."

But Lawrence had broken the seal, and was hastily reading the note. When he had finished he closed it slowly, and put it into his pocket without a word.

Irene grew angry: she thought it was a righteous indignation at Nan's deceptions and other people's credulousness. When Mrs. Hotspur joined them she excused herself almost at once on the plea of weariness. Mrs. Hotspur, going up-stairs an hour or two later, went to her room, but found the door locked; and when, feeling sure her friend was not in bed, she asked if she could be of service, Irene did not open the door, but replied in a voice quite

unlike her own. And then, strange to say, Mrs. Hotspur smiled.

Irene admitted her friend next morning, but said she should not leave her room till evening; that she was tired and out of sorts. Out of sorts she certainly was. She had probably never been so unamiable in her life. She was dissatisfied with everybody, herself included, and she did not know exactly why.

The dissatisfaction with herself increased when, late in the afternoon, Mrs. Hotspur came in, full of anxiety. "My dear," she said, "it seems but a shabby way of treating you to desert you just as you come, but I cannot refuse this appeal. You see he cannot go alone." And she handed Irene a brief note from Lawrence and a letter.

"My dear Constance,—I have this moment received the letter I enclose, and I take to-night's train for the North. I know your goodness of old, and so do not hesitate to ask if you will go with me if you can. The train leaves at eight. Kindly send one word by the messenger, and if you are good enough to go, I shall call for you in time.

"Hastily, but affectionately, yours,

"Lawrence Preston."

That was all. I have said that Irene was not in an amiable mood, and her face flushed as she observed there was no mention of her, though Lawrence was

taking her friend away at the moment of her coming. She looked up with something severe on her lips, but there was no one to listen to it. Mrs. Hotspur was in her own room—packing, doubtless.

So Irene read Nan's letter. She would not have looked at it only that she prided herself on being just; but she began it with a determination not to believe one word of it. What fools men are! she thought; and Constance seemed almost as bad.

But before she had read far she began to doubt; and before she had reached the end, she said, "God forgive me!" And, her stately calm all gone, she rushed in upon Mrs. Hotspur, crying, "Oh, Constance! Constance! if anything happens to her, it will be my doing."

"Now," said Mrs. Hotspur, "you are more unjust to yourself than you were before to her, for you had reason to doubt her; and besides, that had nothing to do with her going to Strathlowrie."

But Irene was not to be comforted. Calm Mrs. Hotspur thought her distress out of proportion to her share in the matter; for after all it was true that Nan had concealed the fact of her mother's existence, and, worst of all, that she had shut the door in her mother's face. At last she said, "Why not go with us?"

"If I only might!" said Irene. "But Lawrence would not like it. I don't suppose he will ever speak to me again."

"My dear, you are growing morbid. You see that Nan tells only her own wrong-doing. She merely mentions that you found out what she had done."

"Yes, but that cuts me to the heart. Oh, if I had only told Lawrence last night!"

"Well, I cannot leave you here alone," said Mrs. Hotspur. "Get ready to go with us, and I will guarantee Lawrence's willingness."

It was not only willingness, but pleasure and gratitude, that brightened Dr. Preston's face when he found Irene was going. How could she bear to spoil it all by telling her story? But she was not more lenient to herself than to others; so, as they sped along through the night, she told it.

"Poor child!" was all Lawrence said.

"You think I was unjust?"

"I think you were just, but not merciful."

"Can you ever forgive me?"

Lawrence could scarcely believe his ears. Irene asking for his forgiveness!

"But I have nothing to forgive," he said.

"Oh!" said Irene, impatiently, "that is what people always say. It only means that they are not generous enough to forgive, and not candid enough to say so."

"It does not mean that with me. When so few of us are just, how can one blame another for not being more than that?" Lawrence spoke a little bit-

terly. The indomitable will that had thrown back his love upon him long ago had lost none of its force, since it could so ruthlessly turn off the poor child that had adored her. There was a long silence, which might have been much longer, only that Lawrence, looking mechanically at the book Irene had taken out, saw drop upon its pages a tear. His heart smote him.

"It was natural to judge her as you did, when you knew her so little," he said, leaning towards Irene and speaking low. "I should like to show you the note you gave me last evening."

Irene would like to see the note, but would not say so for the world. The relations between the two were rather a mystery to her.

"I show it to you," continued Lawrence, "because I know Nan would give me permission. It was a wild fancy of hers, you know, but it was full of love and admiration for you."

"For me?" exclaimed Irene.

"Yes; she was enthusiastic about you before she had even seen you."

Irene took the letter with increased curiosity.

"I have asked you, dear Lawrence, not to open this till you are on the point of leaving Beauvoir, because I wish you to read it when Carrie is better, and when you have once more met her old friend and yours.

"Do you remember the beautiful day on the island when you told your story, and I fell in love with your Irene — so much in love with her that I must have seemed ungratefully forgetful of the honor you were doing me, in my eagerness to arrange for her happiness and yours? I used to spend hours after that day in thinking, What if I should meet Irene?

"And then, as you know, I did meet her, and I found that the half had not been told; and since General le Moine's death a great longing has come over me to make the story end as I planned. Carrie has never said one word to me about it, but I feel instinctively it is the dearest wish of her heart.

"Not to hurt you, but to anticipate your generous scruples, I remind you of what I told you frankly that day—that I did not love you as one should love the person she is going to marry. I am just as sure that you are not in love with me. When you read this I hope you will be as glad to receive your freedom as I am to give it. Make Irene happy, and let me be, with Carrie,

"Your friend and sister,

"NAN."

"I told you it was a wild fancy," said Lawrence; "you will do me the justice to believe I never shared it."

Irene was silent.

"I am sure you do me that justice," repeated Lawrence, earnestly, as it dawned upon him that his motive might be misconstrued.

Still no answer.

"Oh! you pride yourself upon your justice, and yet you can think—"

What, Lawrence never said; for a hand was raised in a deprecating gesture, and Irene, proud Irene, was letting fall on the long-neglected letter not one tear but many—partly for Nan, but oh! partly, too, for herself and for the enchanted days when her story had been not told but lived.

Lawrence was deeply distressed. "Heaven knows I did not mean to pain you," he said. "I only showed it to you for Nan's sake."

"Oh! it is not that," Irene managed to say; "and indeed you have not offended me."

Not that! then what could it be? Lawrence glanced at Mrs. Hotspur. She had announced her intention of going to sleep at once, and she seemed to have accomplished her intention. He pressed the question; Irene made a heroic effort to recover herself.

"Oh! I was only thinking of the island," she said. She tried to speak inconsequently, but there was a suspicious tremor in her tones.

"Irene—dear Irene!" said Lawrence, drawing nearer, "it is not possible you were thinking of the island with regret?"

"What a question!" he continued, after a pause. "I must be getting as imaginative as poor Nan."

"Then so must I," said Irene, in a low voice, but smiling through her tears, for—I am afraid—I was."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

But where was Nan while one, at least, of all her wonderful dreams was being realized?

As the train reached Strathlowrie, a dread came over her lest some fellow-traveller might recognize her. And so, in spite of the changes wrought by three years' absence, it might have happened, but that the railway in that part of the country was but a recent triumph of civilization, and from motives of economy Strathlowrie people generally travelled by steamer when they travelled at all.

The March day was longer than she, accustomed now to the short American twilights, had expected. It was a bleak gray evening, however, with promise of a bleak black night; so, drawing her thick veil more closely over her face, she ventured out of the station. It was almost too light for the Manse yet; she went first to the old church-yard.

With all her romantic fancies Nan had always had a hatred for anything sensational. There had come to her now dull brain, as she sped along, the thought of Lady Deadlock's wanderings and the death upon her old lover's grave. She did not wish

to be like anybody in Dickens; nor did she wish to bring reproach upon her aunt's memory by claiming kinship with her, even in death. She would not so much as pour out her love and sorrow at the grave, as if she were claiming from the dead, who had no voice to refuse her, the sympathy that had been denied to her by the living; she would only go and look at it once more, and then pass on.

The fisher-people were mostly in their houses. A woman at the cottage nearest the church-yard was taking in some peats, but scarcely looked up as she passed. When she reached the high gate it was fastened. It was almost quite dark now, and the woman had gone in. Nan climbed the gate, and stumbling over the grassy hillocks, was in a moment within the roofless walls and at the well-remembered spot. She could not see the words, but she traced them with her finger on the stone: "*Margaret MacDonald, wife of the Rev. Robert Leslie.*" She knelt down at the foot of the grave and kissed it. She heard the waves surging hoarsely on the shore. Yes, everything was just as she had left it. She climbed the gate again, and went on her way.

She might have gone by the sands, but she wanted to see the town. The shops were closed by this time, and but few people were in the streets. She passed Miss Christie's, and wondered if the old aunt of hers who had told her stories about America was still living to hear of her disgrace. She walked on

past the church, so as to get a glimpse of Mr. Campbell's. Then she turned back into the little street where stood the Manse. It never occurred to her to go as a homeless, houseless suppliant to the door and make a last appeal. She only wanted to get a glimpse of them if she could. The dining-room blind was down, and the kitchen shutters were closed, so there was nothing to be seen in front.

She turned down by the sands till she could see the lighted study window. She stood and watched it—she would have liked to sit down, but feared she might not be able to rise again—till the light disappeared, and then she hastened back to the dining-room window to listen for the familiar sounds of psalm and chapter and prayer. She tried to hear what the psalm was, but the noise in her ears made all other sounds indistinct; she knelt on the pavement when the movement of the chairs told her the prayer was beginning, and leaned her burning head on the sill.

Then, as the shutting up for the night began, she moved away lest Jean, who was given to studying the clouds, should look out and see her. She tried the low gate of the outer garden; it was open, and she went in, walked to the farthest corner, and sank down in the grass.

How cool and restful it was! and what a refreshing breeze came from the sea!—so different from the arid flats and stifling air of Florida. She would not

stay long, but she felt strangely weak. Perhaps it would be well to try and eat something, so as to have strength to get away. Nan had not often troubled herself about her duty, but she was trying to do it now.

Her boxes she had quite forgotten, but she still had the lunch-basket in her hand. She opened it and tried to eat, but she could not swallow a mouthful. Her throat was parched. How good a glass of water would be! She almost wished she had stopped somewhere and asked for a little as she came along.

She put her head down. She did not think they would be angry if she took just a little sleep there. She had heard that sleep was more than food, and it would give her strength to be up and away long before morning—so she lay quite still. Two or three hours later, Jim, in Florida, will be breathing her nightly aspiration, "I do hope her bed's soft."

And this was how Nan came back to Strathlowrie.

CHAPTER XXXV.

On that same evening Tory had confided to her husband that she was very unhappy. "What if Nan should come in spite of the telegram!"

Archie thought her friends would be too indignant to let her. Archie was still a violent partisan, and his sympathies were with Nan. When they were children together he had liked her and disliked Margaret, and he was not inclined to take the word of the latter too implicitly. Besides, whatever Nan had done, it was inhuman to turn her from one's door. He declared to Tory that if he had a house she should come to it.

Tory was constrained to admit there was justice in all he said, though it seemed treason to say it. She had never before heard her father's decisions questioned. But she returned to her trouble; what if Nan should come on!

To soothe her, Archie went to his mother and asked a temporary home for Nan should she arrive. Mrs. Campbell thought it would not be wise to offend the minister so openly, especially as they did not know, after all, whether Nan might not have done

something terrible. But she went to Miss Christie, and taking that kind soul into her confidence, arranged for a shelter under her roof till things should be settled.

Archie did more. As Colin was not in town, he went to the train, and fearing to miss her in the dusk, took up his station by the luggage. He found her trunks; and as she did not come to claim them, thought there had not been time for her to get them off after receiving the telegram. So Tory was comforted.

Archie was an early riser; but before he left his room next morning Jean knocked at his door. "Losh preserve us, sir!" she said, "there's been sic a rampin', an rampagin', a' nicht, I'm feared the beast's gane mad. I daurna open the coal-hoose door for fear he'll flee at my throat. Tie ye a naipkin roon' yer haun', sir, to brak' the bite, an I'll hae a red-hot poker ready if the warst comes tae the warst."

Archie opened the coal-house door—without the suggested precautions, however, and Kelpie, upsetting him in an instant, bounded off in such a way as to justify Jean's suspicions, and disappeared in the outer garden. Archie rose, vowing vengeance; and Jean, who had been safely observing them from the nook window, with the door not only shut but bolted, ran to Tory and announced that "the beast" had bitten "Maister Airchibald." The Campbells had one of the rooms with the fine carving, which,

having had a convenient passage added behind, were no longer dependent on the kitchen. Tory could see her husband rushing past the window, and could hear Kelpie barking in the wildest excitement. Then there was a sudden hush. "Ma certie!" said Jean, in triumph, "Maister Airchibald's feenisht him!"

Tory ran to the door, and in a minute Archie was heard on the outside. But it was some time before Jean would allow the door to be opened, either to let Tory out or Archie in.

"You old fool!" cried Archie, "if you don't open it this minute I'll batter it in!"

"Oh, Archie!" exclaimed Tory, as she saw her husband's face, "has he bitten you?"

Archie made an impatient gesture. "Tory," he said, "I want you to be brave. There's somebody in the outer garden."

"It's Nan!" cried Tory, who could think of nothing else; and she was opening the door to go to her.

"Wait, dear," he said. "It's Nan, but I'm afraid she's very, very ill. Help Jean to get a bed ready, and I'll carry her in."

"Help Jean!" cried that worthy. "'Deed, then, she'll just hae to help hersel'. I daurna for my life gang against the minister." Jean was excited by the news, but had not forgotten having been called an old fool. Tory was already at work.

"Jean," said Archie, with decision, "if you don't

go this minute I'll take that red-hot poker to you; and if you utter a sound to bring the minister down, I'll set Kelpie on you, as sure as death."

Jean went.

Nan was brought in and put into bed, and Archie, hurrying off for Dr. Cameron, ran against the minister coming down to see what all the noise was about.

"I'll show you, sir," said Archie, briefly. "Step this way."

The minister went, and saw Tory bending over a bed on which lay a restless form that tossed its arms about and moaned. Drawing nearer he could see the dishevelled hair and crimson cheeks, and the eyes that were at once so bright and so unknowing.

The minister looked inquiringly at his son-in-law.

"It's Nan, sir," said Archie, "after a March night's sleep in the outer garden; and if you think of turning her out now, just understand that my wife and I go with her."

The minister looked at Tory. No one, old or young, had ever spoken to him as did this bold young man. Tory did not even look at him. He turned and left the room. Passing through the kitchen, he saw Daft Geordie at the window making signals of distress. Mr. Leslie opened the door.

"Losh, minister!" said Geordie, presenting a telegram, "ye maun hae sleepit in. I thocht ye were a'

deid. Ye're to write the answer on this, an' I'm to tak' it."

The message was simply that Nan's American friends were on their way to see her, and asking if she was in Mr. Leslie's house. For a reply the minister wrote the one word, yes.

And so the now happy party sped on to Strathlowrie.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Of all the hearts to which Nan's terrible illness brought sorrow, the sorest were the minister's and Irene's. In the long, weary days of watching and waiting those two drew together.

Not that the mere fact of Nan's suffering would have made the minister regret his course. "Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come," he would have told you. He, as God's agent, had done what was just; the degree of punishment was with God, and was the consequence not of any agency but of the sin itself.

Even the plain truths in regard to his elder daughter, to which Dr. Preston had forced him to listen, had not greatly modified his judgment in regard to Nan. He was touched, but not remorseful; the circumstances, he said, might palliate, but they could not excuse. When Lawrence remarked bitterly that he supposed Mr. Leslie would allow that the punishment exceeded the offence—which was really only girlish imprudence—the minister quoted Bishop Butler to the effect that punishment very often seems out of proportion to that which produces it,

and that prudence and imprudence are of the nature of virtue and vice, and are in the same manner rewarded and punished.

Bishop Butler! The Scottish landscape, rugged and gray, seemed to vanish; and Lawrence saw as in a dream the far-off island in the river, and Nan standing in the mellow light telling him in her enthusiastic way of having coached a student in the "Analogy." He did not need to recall—for he never forgot—her passionate admiration and chivalrous defence of Irene, and the eager way in which she had sketched the ending of the romance. Lawrence felt that he owed her the happiness of his life, and it maddened him to hear her old favorite brought up against her. "If I thought of God as you do," he said to Mr. Leslie, "I would put myself on the side of the devil."

"Oh hush!" cried Irene, coming forward before the minister could speak. "It is you who are unjust now, Lawrence. You must forgive him," she went on, turning to the minister with all her wonted grace and far more than her wonted softness; "he forgets that we are but strangers to you, and that you do not need strangers to speak to you for Nan. But you will let her speak for herself; you will read her poor little letters; and oh, I hope they will not break your heart as they have broken mine!"

And Irene placed the two letters which Lawrence had given her on the study-table, and beckoned

Lawrence from the room. The beautiful Southerner judged the minister by herself, and she judged him rightly. She remembered how credulous she had thought Mrs. Hotspur and Lawrence, and how superior she had felt to both in her calm consciousness of justice. She comprehended the minister as Lawrence could not; she would let Nan speak for herself.

Irene saw the minister no more that day. Late in the evening he came out of his study and left the house. "He is gone to the church-yard," said Archie, his heart relenting a little towards the oppressor for the first time since he had found Nan. When the minister returned from the church-yard he went softly into the sick-room and laid his hand in blessing on the restless head, and said over again the vow of loving care for Nan's future which he had made at his wife's grave; and from the sick-room he went back to the study, and throwing himself on his knees, cried, "Oh, my bairn! my bairn!" And the last thought of anger drowned in the strong tide of love and sorrow, wrestled in prayer until the morning.

And then, in the days that followed, Irene filled up for him what the letter had left incomplete. She spoke of Nan herself—such a strange mixture of real gifts and unreal dreams—translated suddenly from the watchful care of the Manse to a sphere where she was absolutely her own mistress. She told how the finding of the mother had been kept a dead se-

cret till, by refusing to marry Lawrence, she had brought down upon herself Mrs. O'Neil's wrath, and been literally turned out upon the world. She pictured the journey to Florida, begun in her romantic fancies of Mercedes Guzman and ending in the unlovely realities of "Starkses" — an awakening followed by the long, dreary winter when, as she had said in her letter to Lawrence, she felt herself forsaken by God and man. And she told all this, not as bearing on the minister's part in the tragedy, but on her own. "God forgive me!" she cried. "But for me she would have turned back when she got your message." "But for me," thought the minister, "she would not have lain through the March night without bed to rest in or roof to cover her. God forgive *me!*"

The minister was the least mercenary of men, and yet it would be idle to deny that Miss Preston's legacy had its effect upon him. It would free Nan from the burden of debt; it would to a great extent assure her future; above all it was a proof of the regard in which she had been held. Not for a moment did he think of any possible advantage to the Manse. The Americans were determined to take Nan back with them. Preston Place was not to be sold after all, and Nan was to be doubly, trebly welcome, they said, to her old place in it. While the minister thought Nan penniless he had refused his consent to this plan, declaring that she should remain with him; but

when he heard of the legacy he decided that she should choose for herself.

News was flashed from house to house in Strathlowrie that Nan MacDonald had come back again. Tory remembered with what proud confidence Nan had predicted it should be so. How little either of them had guessed at such a coming! At first there were all sorts of rumors as to her arriving alone; though the telegraphist — one of Mr. Leslie's own flock—had kept his counsel well. But when it was known that the Americans had come, it was taken for granted that only Nan's impatience to see Strathlowrie again had made her outspeed them. As for Jean, she would have been hanged, drawn, and quartered before betraying the secret of the fatal night, and did not hesitate to answer every question put to her in the true Scotch way—by asking another. "Hoo was't she cam' alane?" she echoed after Andrewina, who, established at the Manse again, dared to put the interrogation. "Gin ye felt a fivver comin' on, wad ye no be in a hurry to win hame tae yer ain fowks an' yer ain bed? Naebody but a muckle sumph wad hae to ask!" The muckle sumph carefully spread the information; and gave, moreover, such glowing accounts of the wealth and greatness of the Americans and of their devotion to Nan that, had the latter appeared as the famous authoress or the daughter of the Guzmans—the two rôles between which she had hesitated in picturing her return—she

could scarcely have elicited more interest. Kind old Miss Macalaster came daily from the castle, stopping the yellow chariot at the corner lest it should disturb the invalid. So many were the inquiries that Kirsty Polson—a reformed character since the days of "holies"—had a chair in the porch, with nothing to do from morning till night but answer questions and cry herself nearly blind. Kind-hearted Colin, unable in his anxiety to settle to business, sent tidings to far-off Rob and Davie, and, moved by his brother-in-law, took care that the minister's late unfavorable accounts of Nan should be modified; Dr. Preston remembered the loving pair in Florida; while Archie confided to his wife that on his own responsibility he had indited and mailed to Margaret a "stinger."

But a little while before, and, as far as Nan knew, all the world was against her. At last the tide had turned. The past was no longer exaggerated, and such as it was, it was blotted out forever. She should come back, every one she cared for vowed, to life and to most tender love together.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The long delirium was over, and Nan was in a deep sleep. When she awoke it would be to conscious life—or to death.

In the Manse the familiar sounds of daily life were hushed. In a stillness like that of the grave they watched and waited—Mrs. Hotspur at the sleeper's side, and, hand-in-hand at a little distance, the two ideals of Nan's childhood, the Angel Tory and the King's Daughter.

Suddenly the town-clock struck. The tones were mellow in themselves and faint by reason of distance, but at the sound the sleeper stirred and her lips moved noiselessly. Then, opening on Mrs. Hotspur calm and conscious eyes, she smiled and slowly said, "I should like to send a message to Mother Françoise. Tell her I never forgot the little prayer."

And, having said this, Nan passed on.

THE END.

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